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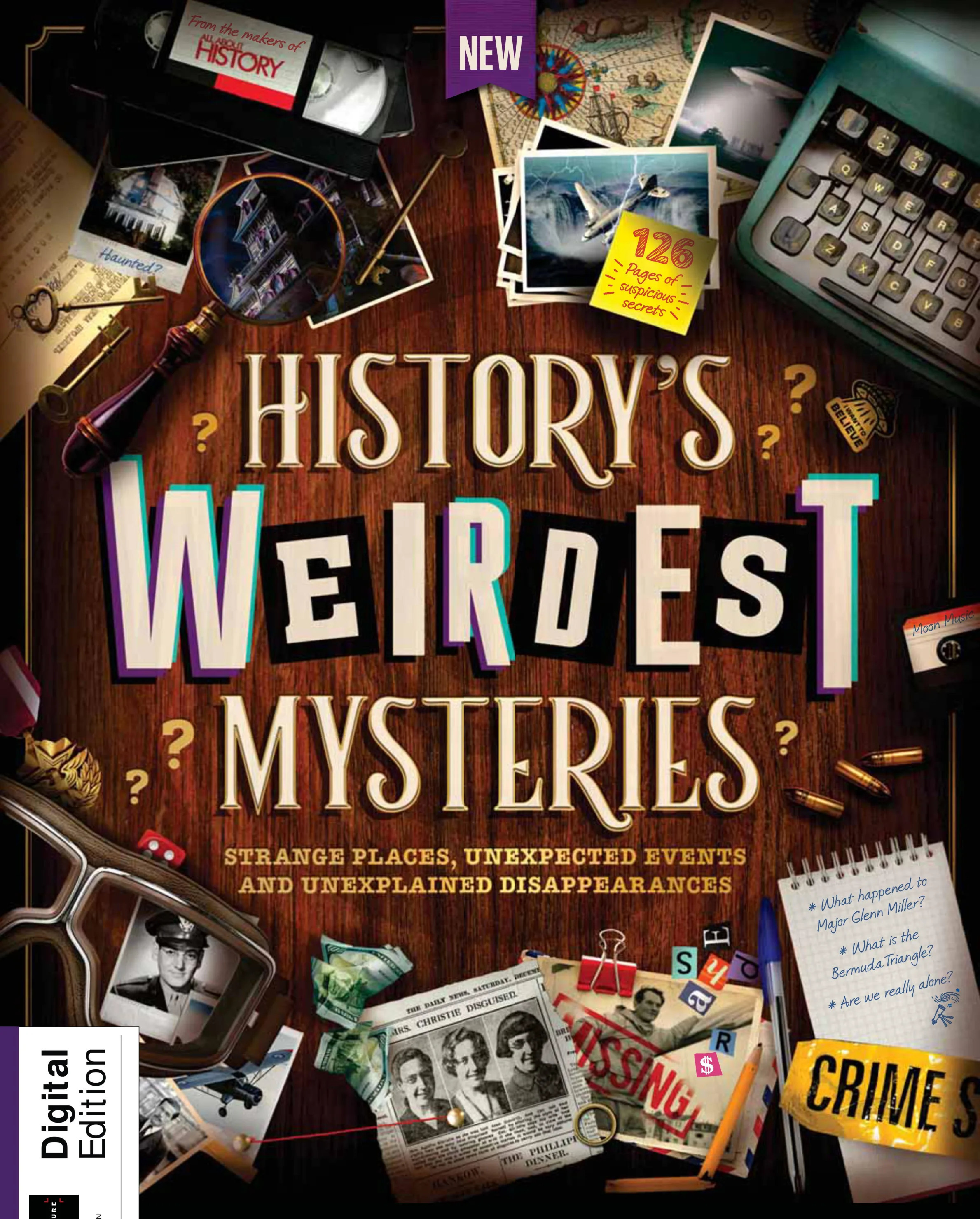
HISTORY'S WEIRDEST MYSTERIES

STRANGE PLACES, UNEXPECTED EVENTS AND UNEXPLAINED DISAPPEARANCES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WELCOME TO HISTORY'S WEIRDEST MYSTERIES

History is supposed to explain the events of the past, but some of them defy explanation or even rational belief. How can ships and aeroplanes vanish from the seas and skies? Why are there formations in the ocean depths that look eerily like alien structures? Are they the lost sunken lands of myth? What strange energies fuel the dancing lights in the Texan desert? Could a ghost send email in the 1980s? Join us as we delve into all of these bizarre questions and more as we reveal history's weirdest mysteries…

HISTORY'S WEIRDEST MYSTERIES

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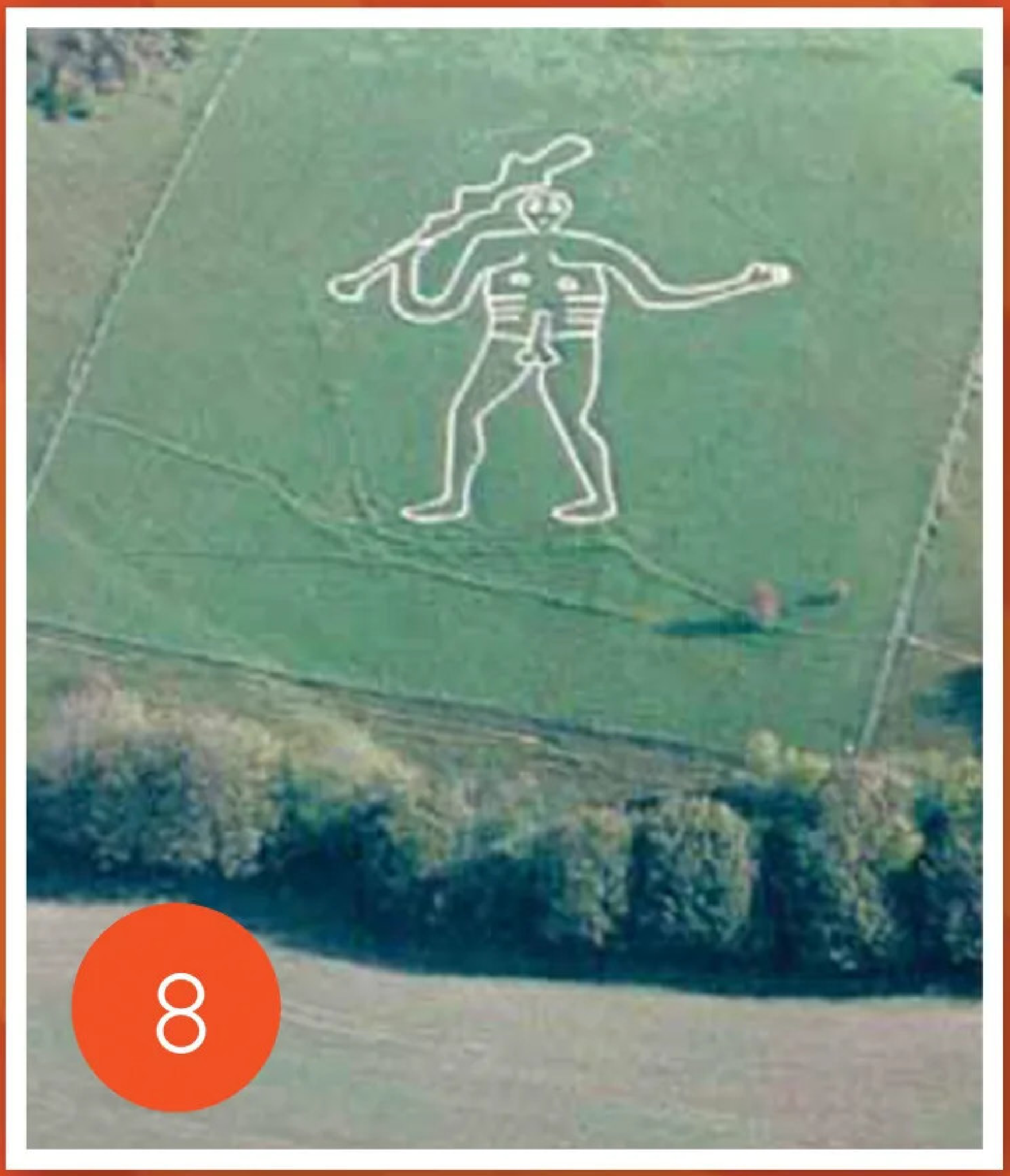
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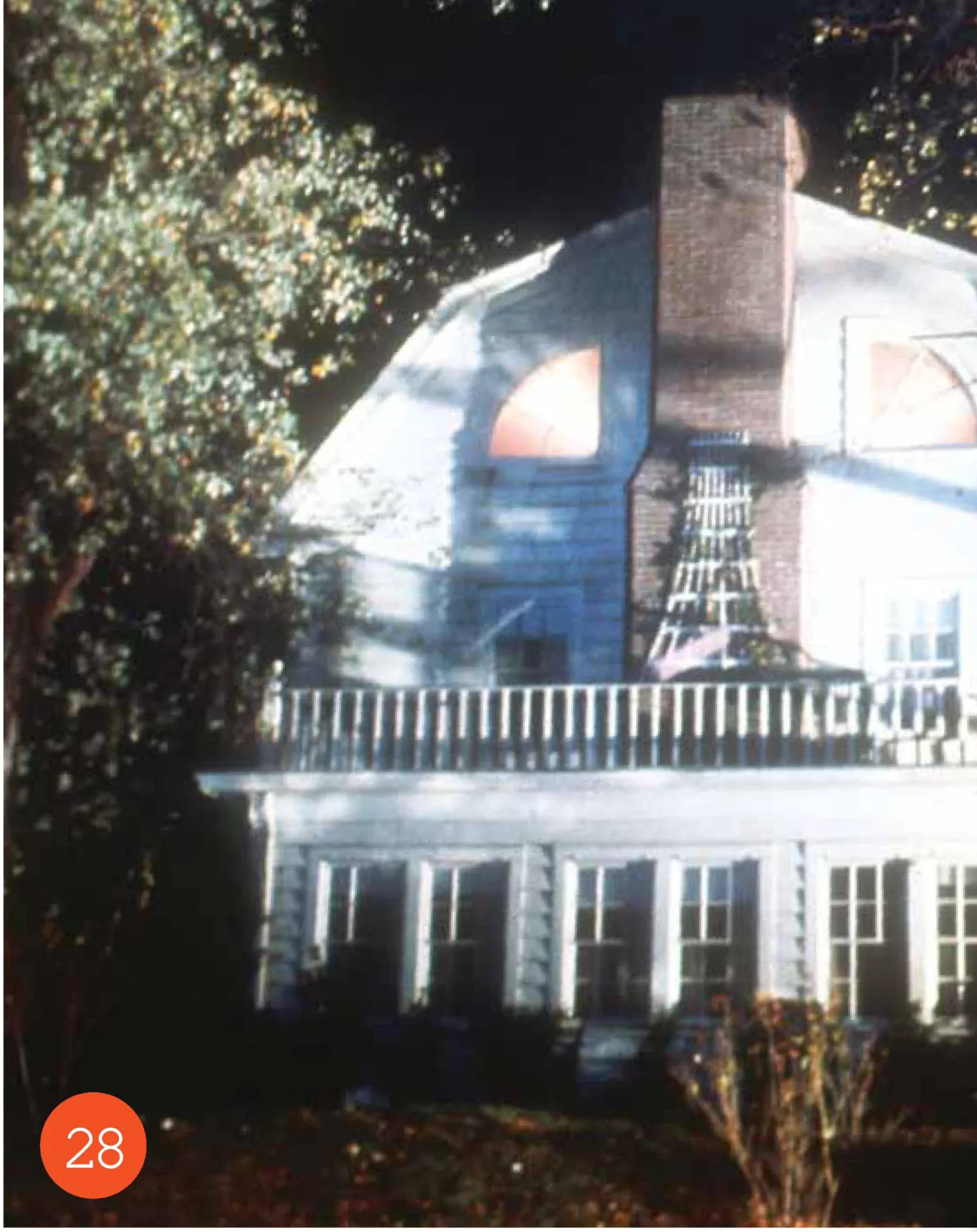

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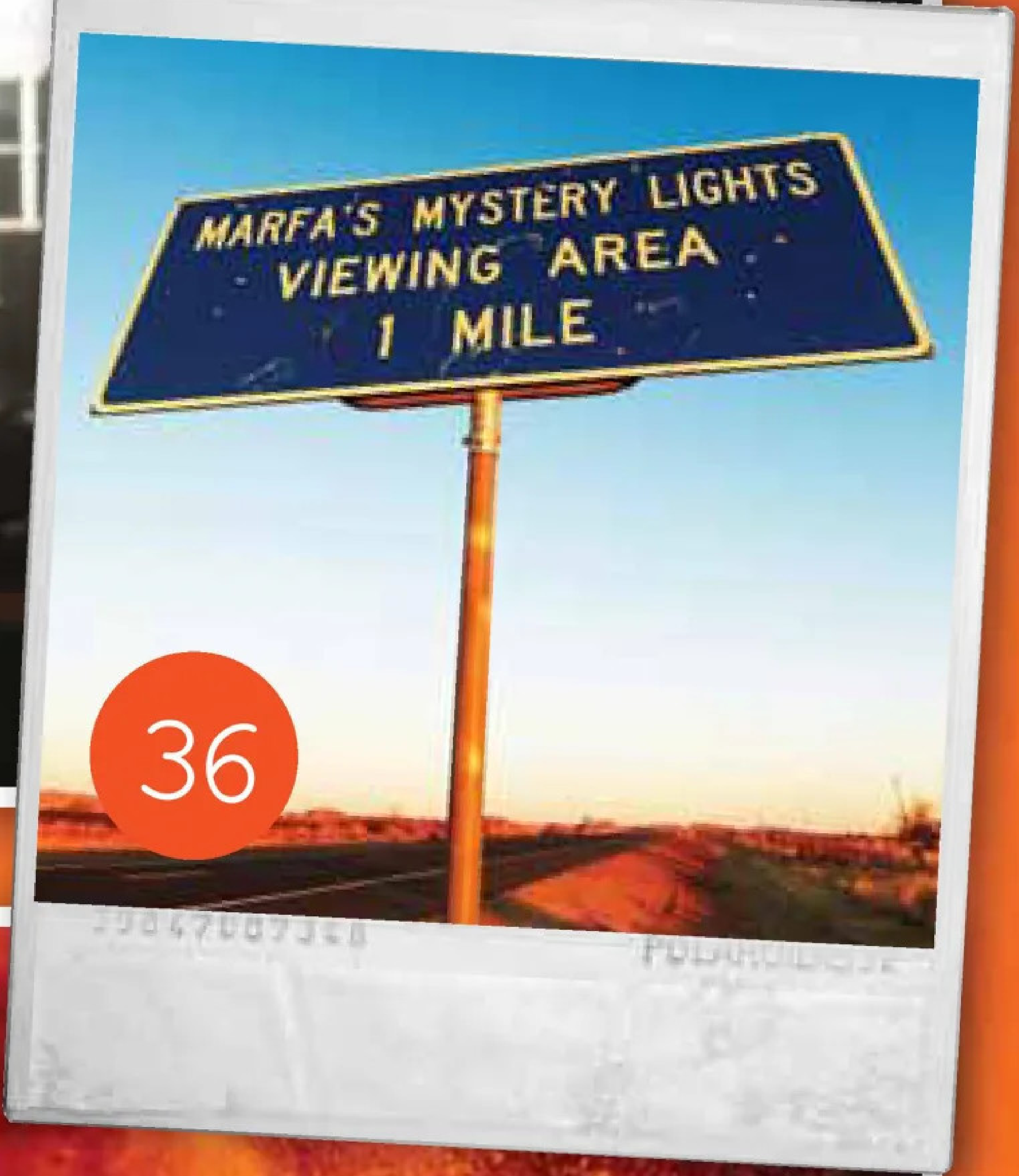

MARFA'S MYSTERY LIGHTS
VIEWING AREA
1 MILE

36

22

14

LEY LINES AND EARTH MYSTERIES

From Stonehenge to ley lines, humanmade and natural structures the world over continue to puzzle us with their enduring mysteries and secrets

WRITTEN BY **JACK GRIFFITHS**

Living all over the globe, almost from pole to pole, humans occupy nearly every corner of the world. Seemingly, nearly everything has already been discovered and understood as humankind has learnt almost all there is to know about the planet and what's on it. However, the Earth still holds a number of mysteries – both natural and ancient human-made structures – which still aren't fully understood.

Seeing is believing, or so we're told, but gravity hills beg to differ. Also known as magic roads, these are an optical illusion that makes it look you're travelling uphill when you're actually going down. Perhaps best experienced in a car, the phenomenon is caused by the surrounding landscape making it falsely look as if you are rolling uphill, even though gravity is working as normal, taking the car down a slope. Often, the horizon and other points of reference like buildings, aren't viewable from the angle the hill is on, skewing your perception of the slope further, as your brain focuses on the road rather than the surroundings, which would usually prove its true and real gradient. The unusual occurrence means that, across the world, magic roads have spawned myths and legends. One such tale is that a ghost pushes the cars up the hill and, if you brake to stop the ghost, it'll steal all your petrol.

On the south-west coast of Africa is another magical phenomena, this time named after a fairy. Namibia's fairy circles are a spectacular round pattern on the ground that look like the Earth has chickenpox. The circles had long puzzled scientists with some attributing them to termites, while others believed that plants had specifically somehow chosen where to grow. The real answer was closer to the latter with the culprit actually being grass around the rings sucking all the moisture out of these small areas. With the malnourished grass dying, the circles remained while vegetation grew around them.

Perhaps the most famous structure with mystical associations created by humankind is Stonehenge. The prehistoric monument is famous for the large stones that make up its circular formation but, millennia after its construction, it still isn't completely clear what it is or why and how it was built. The purpose of Stonehenge is believed to be spiritual and it's thought that the stones align with the movement of the sun from sunrise to sunset – a phenomena that is especially prevalent at the midsummer and midwinter solstices – as well as the monthly phases of the moon. Therefore, it is reasoned that it acted as a sort of neolithic calendar for the changing of the seasons as well as a burial site. Mystery surrounds just how the stones – that weigh more than 22 tons – were moved into place, especially as the type of rock is not found

The oldest stones at Stonehenge date to circa 2,500BCE but the function and meaning of the structure still isn't completely understood

Images source: Wiki

all that locally to Stonehenge. Some believe that the stones were left in the area after the melting of a glacier during an ice age, while others are of the opinion that they were moved into place by humans using wooden rollers or sledges. Despite being one of the most well-known ancient structures in the world, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we can't say for sure what its true purpose really was and its mystery lives on.

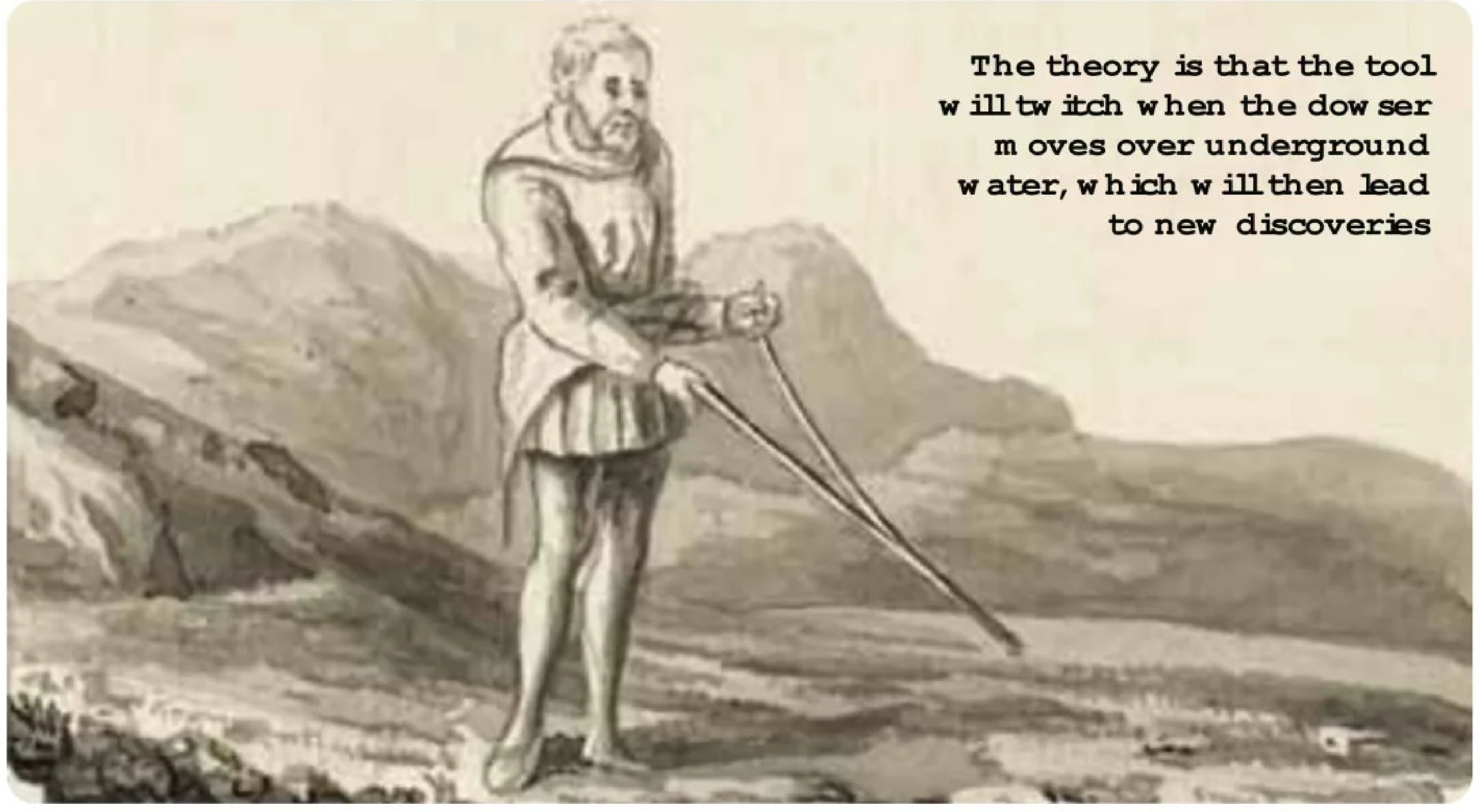
Only 20 miles away from Stonehenge is Avebury, another neolithic formation that, with more than 100 stones, is the largest stone circle in Europe. It is a ceremonial burial site but, unlike its nearby counterpart, wooden structures are likely to have also been on the site. Avebury has a network of banks, ditches and circles but, unlike many similar structures, a square monument has been discovered beneath the site. Surveys also suggest that there was a small wooden building and both are believed to date back to around 3,500 BCE. The purpose of Avebury isn't known for sure but theories include that it was a ceremonial or religious gathering place, in a similar way to Stonehenge, that was used to measure astronomical events and celebrate the beginning and the end of seasons. The mystery surrounding Avebury grows further as it's supposed that many of the stones were moved, buried or destroyed by order of the early Christian church as it was believed that they were relics of pagan worshipping. Some were also used for construction during stone shortages in the 18th century so the site may have been larger and more complete than it is today.

In parts of England, some of the rolling hills have large chalk figures emblazoned upon them. A prominent example is the 50-metre Cerne Abbas Giant, which depicts a man carrying a club. It is unknown who created it with some believing it was the Celts while others suggest it was created in the Anglo-Saxon era or even during the English Civil War. It is thought that couples would venture up to the Giant by night in the hope its distinctly phallic symbolism would bless families with children. Another glyph at Uffington, Wiltshire, illustrates a giant horse, and a similar design was used on Celtic coins, although its unusual design means that some believe it to represent a dragon. These vast images were thought to symbolise or honour gods and bring good luck. One story behind the Uffington White Horse is that it will awake and dance upon the hill if King Arthur were to rise again. Recently, it's theorised that it may have been created for the Celtic and Roman goddess of horses, Epona. These markings have inspired more recent versions including the Osmington White Horse made for King George III in 1808, and a 1.5 acre kiwi bird in New Zealand created in 1919 after the First World War to welcome returning New Zealand troops.

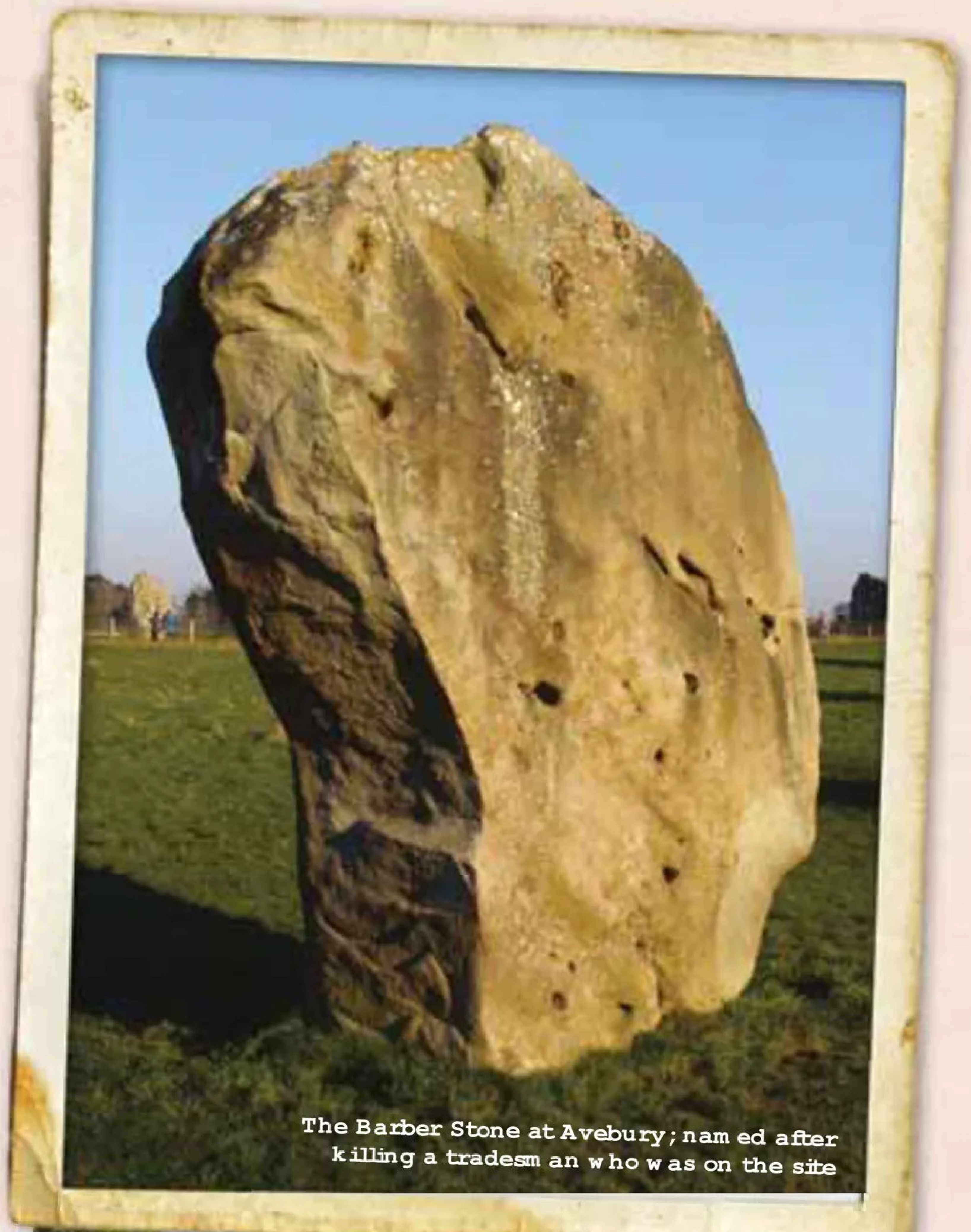
→

HOW ARE THESE MYSTERIOUS SPIRITUAL LOCATIONS FOUND?

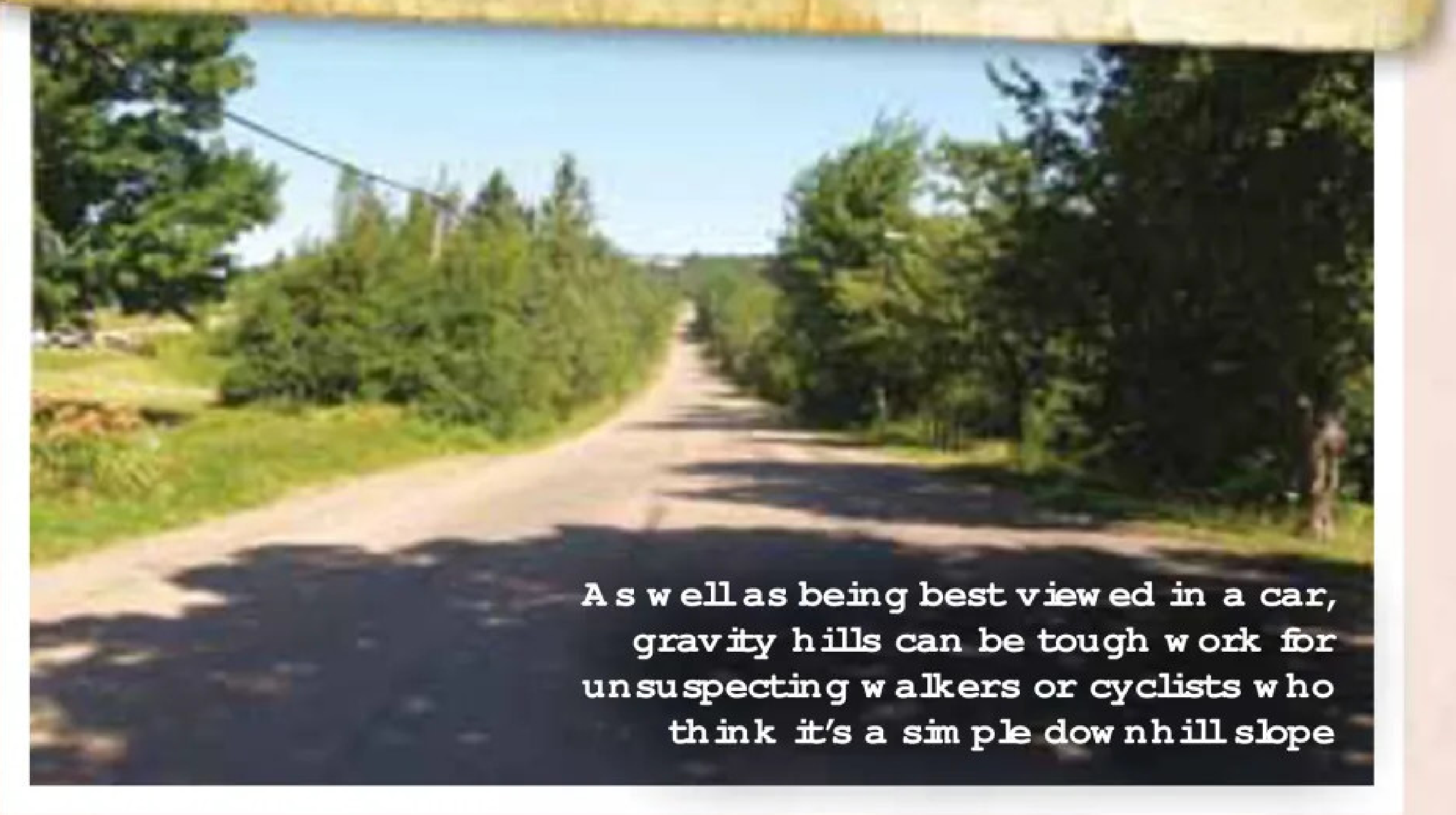
Dowsing is the use of wooden or metal rods to detect hidden archaeological features. When held out, the Y-shaped instrument is seemingly moved by hidden energy and can locate underground water and oil, or potentially lead to undiscovered ancient objects. Research has shown that dowsing only works if the user already has some prior information of roughly where the target can be found and the tool is unable to locate anything by itself. The only success from dowsing has been through inaccurate or misplaced anecdotes and not scientific fact. Indeed, the rods may look like they move towards an area that contains subterranean water but it's only because of the movements of the user's arms that this happens. This is what's called the ideomotor effect, where someone moves unconsciously but believes that the movements aren't caused by them but by something else – supernatural or otherwise. A similar phenomenon occurs when a Ouija board is used. In addition, dowsers usually operate where it's known that water is underground anyway. Therefore, the idea of dowsing is built on random chance. This doesn't stop dowsers being called in to locate water to this day, however. Well, if it works, who needs a reason why?



The theory is that the tool will twitch when the dowser moves over underground water, which will then lead to new discoveries



The Barber Stone at Avebury; named after killing a tradesman who was on the site

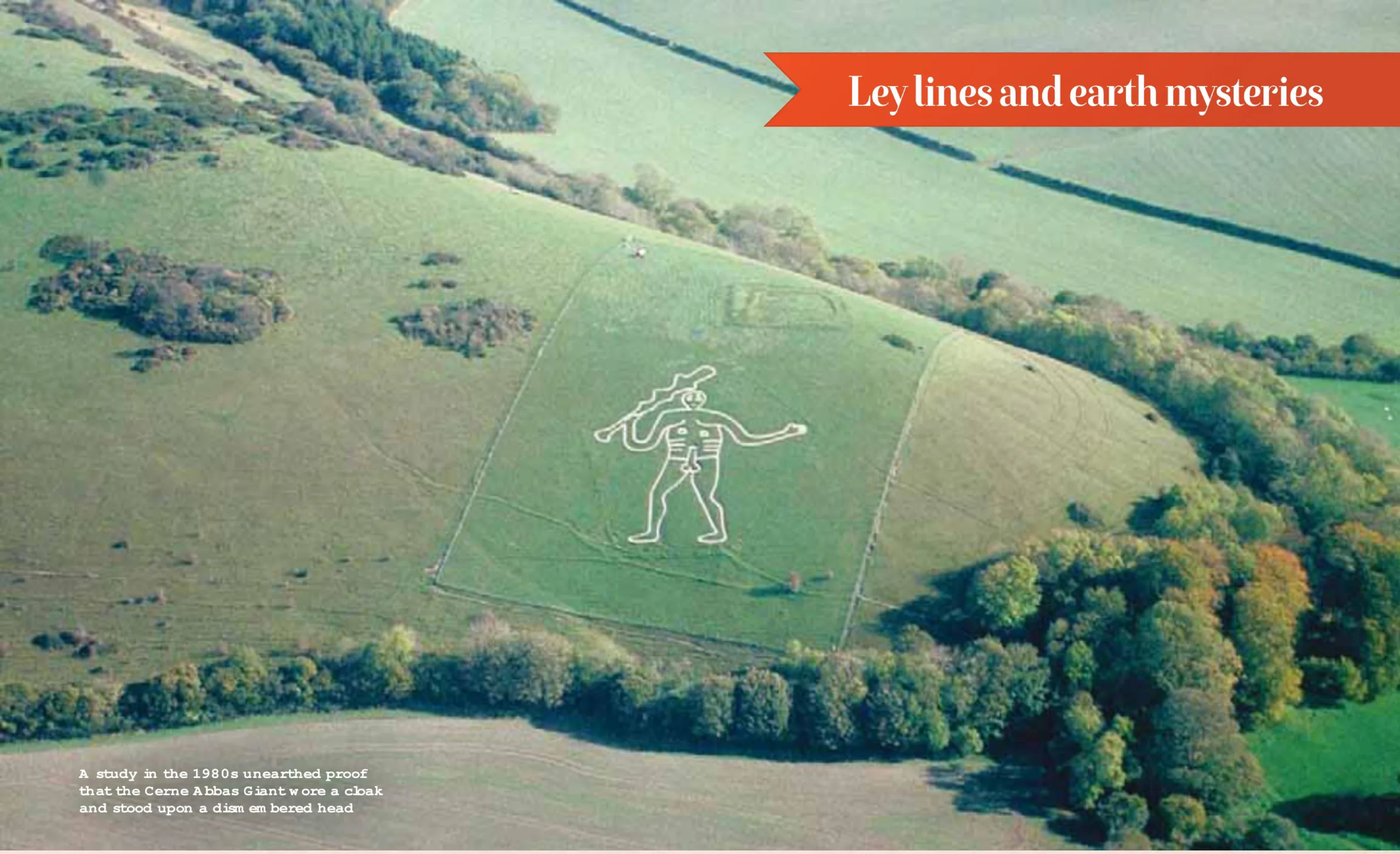


As well as being best viewed in a car, gravity hills can be tough work for unsuspecting walkers or cyclists who think it's a simple downhill slope

One theory combines natural and human-made structures at specific locations across the globe. Ley lines involve the theory that historical monuments were purposely constructed in a connected network and are an example of ancient lost knowledge. It's proposed that this formation was used purposely to create spiritual ties between ancient sites. This belief can be as small-scale as connections between Stonehenge and Avebury or a much larger scope such as between the Great Wall of China and the Egyptian pyramids. This thought can also be expanded into crop circles and natural landscapes such as Uluru. The concept of ley lines revolves around the idea of the Earth's spiritual energy rather than a physical or navigational link between locations. Ley lines vary between cultures with the idea of fairy paths originating from Ireland, dragon lines from China and spirit lines from the Incan societies in South America. In the UK, St Michael's Line is a supposed 350 mile ley line that exists between St Michael's Mount in Cornwall and Norfolk.

Over the Irish Sea, jutting out from the Northern Irish coast, is a famous landscape known as the Giant's Causeway. A formation of hexagonal columns, it was formed 50-60 million years ago by the cooling of superheated rock into distinctive shapes. Nearby ancient volcanoes spewed out lava that cooled into the rocky columns you can see today. The ancient tale states that the striking causeway was created by the mythical Irish hero Finn MacCool who was a giant trying to get closer to a rival giant in Scotland. Modern technology has since dispelled the folklore behind the causeway but the name has stuck. Scientific experiments on samples of basaltic rock in Iceland demonstrated that the cooling process that formed the causeway and also created another remarkable natural formation which reaches into the sky rather than stepping out into the ocean.

Standing alone on the horizon, the genesis of the Devil's Tower in Wyoming, USA is still tricky to understand. A thick spire of rock shooting up into the air, it's theorised that it originated as subterranean molten rock that rose to the Earth's surface as one huge mass. Erosion over 50 million years has left only the strongest rock to become a tower hundreds of metres in the air. A particularly tall tale explains why it is known as the Devil's Tower. The Native American Sioux had a story that a giant bear scratched at a mountain while chasing children and, eventually, it had clawed for so long that only the Bear's Tower remained. However, a mistranslation mean that 'bear' was substituted for 'bad god' in interpretations, which then became 'devil'. Not for the first time, a misunderstanding has formed a myth out of a legend.



A study in the 1980s unearthed proof that the Cerne Abbas Giant wore a cloak and stood upon a dismembered head

Ley is an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'clearing in the woods'. The Malvern Hills area in Worcestershire, England is believed to carry ley lines

HOUSKA CASTLE

This Czech fortress is said to guard a gateway into the depths of Hell

About 50km away from Prague stands a castle that seemingly serves absolutely no purpose. Houska Castle was built in the 14th century by the Bohemian ruler Ottokar II. The castle changed hands several times, enjoying a Renaissance redesign in the late-16th century, before falling into disrepair in the 18th century. By the 20th century, the curious legend of Houska Castle had attracted the attention of one particular group of people: the Nazis. Unlike other fortresses of the period, it wasn't meant to house the king. The castle wasn't near any trading route and there was no access to water. Defences were built inside the castle rather than outside – instead of keeping people out, it seemed like the castle was meant to trap something else in.

According to lore, this apparently pointless construction was, in fact, built over the gates of Hell. A bottomless hole had existed at Houska for centuries, a gateway for demons and evil beings to enter Earth and terrorise people. The area has long been avoided by locals, and even to this day the castle is given a wide berth, with only the inquisitive daring to set enter.

Above this fateful hole stands the chapel, dedicated to none other than the leader of God's army, Archangel Michael. Frescoes decorate the walls – but their gory tales give an insight into what lurks below, with left-handed demons clawing their way out of the scenes.

However, before the chapel's construction, the hole was involved in some sinister experiments. Attempts were made to fill the hole with rocks, but no matter how many rocks were thrown in, it never seemed to fill. It's alleged that one duke summoned prisoners who had been condemned to death and offered them a pardon if they agreed to be lowered into the hole. Many agreed, expecting to escape with their lives. They were mistaken. There was silence as one was lowered down. Moments later, his uncontrollable screams echoed up from the depths. As he was hauled back out, they discovered his hair had turned white and he'd aged several decades. They never found out what was in there – it drove the prisoner to madness, and he died days later.

Houska Castle's secrets don't end there. Many visitors claim to have experienced supernatural encounters, from the ghost of a woman that stalks the corridors, to curious animal-like presences skittering on the edge of sight. It's these stories and supernatural sightings that struck a chord with the esoterica-obsessed Nazis. From 1939 to 1945, Houska Castle was home to occult experiments, but records were destroyed and it's not known what happened here. However, several skeletons of Nazi officers were discovered during renovations.

Images source: Getty, Alamy

LOST LANDS AND PHANTOM ISLANDS

Humans have always wondered what's over the next horizon, and according to legend there were always strange and curious lands just out of sight

WRITTEN BY **BEN GAZUR**

For much of human history travel was arduous, expensive, and risky. The best way to discover what lay outside your town or village was to listen to the tales told by folk who had been out into the world. What these travellers told you might have seemed unbelievable but with so many people saying similar things it made the world sound wondrous. Africa was full of giant grey beasts with long tusks and a nose as long as a man. In the far east there were cultures older than time with cities larger than any in Europe. And then there were lands even stranger.

The Greeks told stories of the islands Chryse and Argyre, made of gold and silver respectively. Chinese lore spoke of Fusang in the distant east where a tree of immortality grew. Though no one had ever visited these lands they could change history. In the Middle Ages the legendary king Prester John was the hope of Christians in Europe as he supposedly ruled a vast kingdom in the east which would be a powerful ally against their Muslim foes.

Going in search of these lost lands reveals much about the people of the past and their knowledge of the Earth.

X EL DORADO – INCREDIBLY WEALTHY CITY, SOUTH AMERICA – STILL NOT FOUND

X LYONNESSE – DROWNED KINGDOM, CORNWALL, UK – STILL NOT FOUND

X IRAM OF THE PILLARS – GODFORSAKEN CITY, ARABIAN DESERT – STILL NOT FOUND

The volcanic eruption of Thera disrupted weather across the globe and spelled the doom of many towns

THERA: THE REAL ATLANTIS?

Did the catastrophic explosion of a volcano inspire the legend of Atlantis?

Visitors to the paradise island of Santorini in the Aegean Sea would be hard pressed to describe it as a disaster zone. In the 17th century BCE there was a thriving Minoan society on the island. They raised beautiful buildings, decorated them with elegant frescoes, and wove delicate clothes. Then around 1600 BCE the people of the island were wiped from the map by the eruption of the volcano Thera that forms the heart of the island.

The explosion of Thera was one of the largest recorded eruptions in human history. Hundreds of metres of ash were deposited. Much of the island was obliterated leaving just a rim of the volcano protruding from the sea. Earthquakes and tsunamis destroyed many Minoan settlements on nearby islands. Was a folk memory of this cataclysm at the basis of Plato's tale of Atlantis?

Plato described the Atlanteans as ruling from an island which was swallowed by a natural disaster. "But afterwards there occurred violent earthquakes and floods; and in a single day and night of misfortune all your warlike men in a body sank into the earth, and the island of Atlantis in like manner disappeared in the depths of the sea."

The sudden destruction of ancient Thera certainly seems to fit this description. There are problems with the identification of Atlantis with Thera, however. Plato is careful to describe Atlantis as being in the Atlantic Ocean and not in the nearby Aegean. In Plato's telling the island of Atlantis was larger than Libya and Asia combined, which ancient Thera was definitely not even before part of it blew up. Finally Plato would not have had to cast his mind back over 1000 years for tales of earthquakes and tsunamis – they were relatively common in the geologically unstable eastern Mediterranean. The hunt for Atlantis, if it was ever more than an idea, must continue.

Bryher
Tresco
Samson
St Martins
Fertile plain, field walls, houses, graves
Annet
Bishop Rock
Western Rocks
St Mary's
St Agnes
Bronze Age Sc
Coastline in 3,000

LYONNESSE

In the Arthurian legend of Tristan and Iseult, the hero Tristan is the son of the king of Lyonesse. This land stretched far out into the sea beyond Cornwall and was rich in lands and populated by strong and healthy people. They constructed grand towns and towering churches. Then in a single night the whole land was washed under the sea. Only the group of rocks known as Seven Stones Reef now marks the location of this sunken kingdom.

HY-BRASIL

In maps from the 14th century onwards to the west of Ireland you can find an island called Brasil or Hy-Brasil. Expeditions were launched from Bristol in the 1480s. There was a claimed sighting in 1674 when Captain John Nisbet saw a bank of fog lift which revealed the island. On land he met a man who claimed the island was usually kept hidden by the magic of a wizard but the spell was broken. The island was never seen again.

Brasil
Galwey
Dorsey

LEMURIA

A lost continent in the Indian ocean has been given the name Lemuria. It was first proposed to explain why fossils of lemurs were found in India and Madagascar but not in Africa. Lemuria would have allowed the animals to cross a land bridge. It was then incorporated into Theosophical beliefs as the home of a powerful civilisation known as the Third Root-Race. The theory of plate tectonics and the movement of landmasses has since explained how lemurs are found in India and Madagascar.

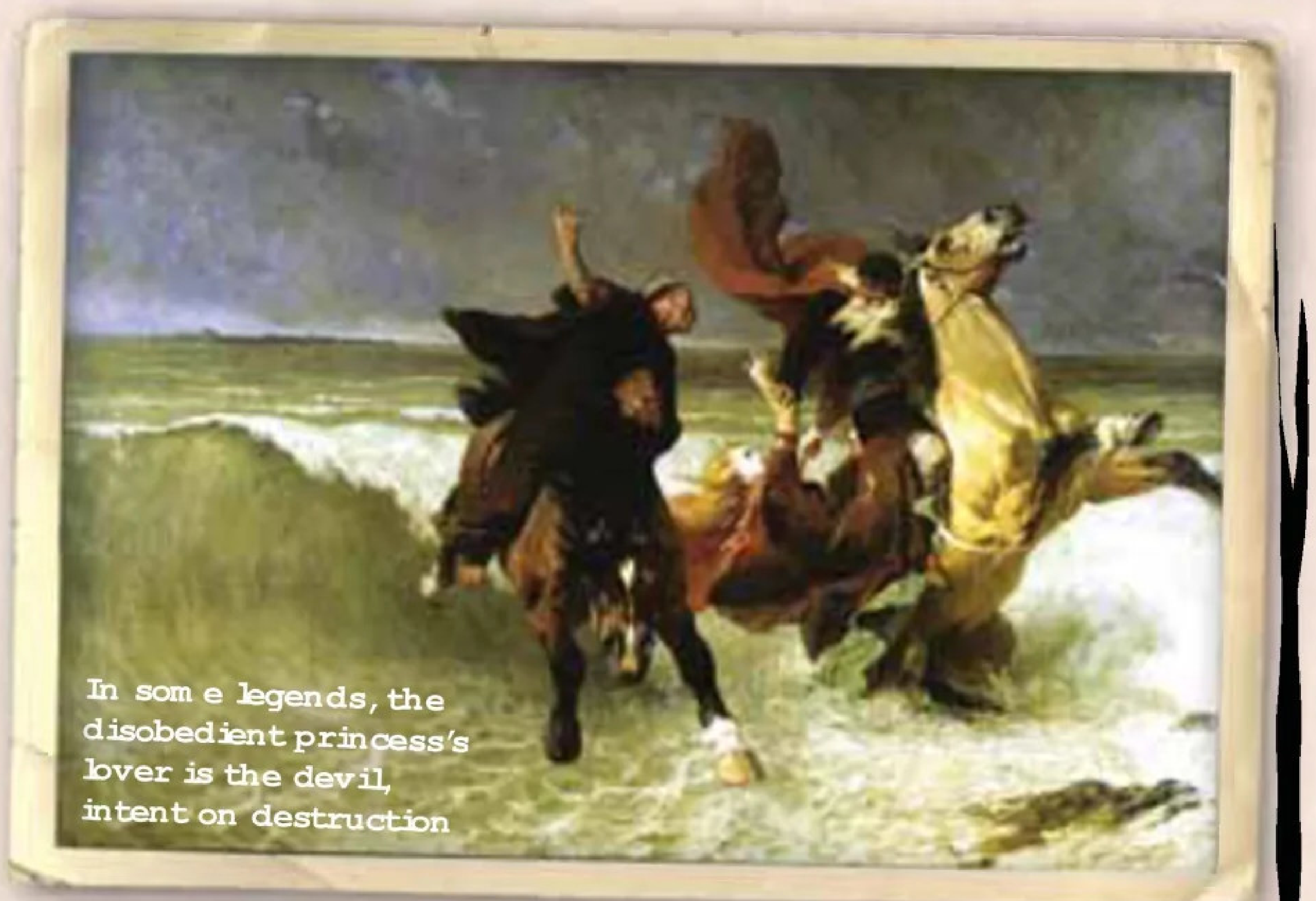
In the late 19th century the archaeologist Augustus Le Plongeon thought he found similarities between the writing of the ancient Egyptians and Mayans. To explain a link between the two he hypothesised a lost continent that lay in the Atlantic called Mu. Civilisation had been carried to Egypt by a Queen Móo from Mu, and also to the New World. Others have placed Mu in the Pacific but have been unable to locate it.

Lemuria and Mu are now both the subject of pseudoarchaeology and are frequently interlinked by fringe believers

Western expeditions in the 1920s aimed to reach Shambhala but were unsuccessful

SHAMBHALA

The ancient Tibetan religion of Bon has legends that it was founded by a man called Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche who arrived from a land known as Shambhala – the Land of Peace. Only those who were pure of heart could live in Shambhala. Various descriptions place Shambhala in a deep valley or beside a mountain in the Himalayas. No one has ever found Shambhala, but that may be because it lies at the intersection between the physical and spiritual realms according to believers.



In some legends, the disobedient princess's lover is the devil, intent on destruction

YS

According to Breton myth the city of Ys was build on the coast of Brittany by the wise and pious King Gradlon who used dykes to hold back the sea. Unfortunately his daughter, Princess Dahut, opened the dykes to let in a lover and the whole city was swallowed. Legends say that the city of Ys will emerge from the sea when Paris is engulfed by waters. Some say the bells of Ys can still be heard ringing beneath the waves where the city sank.

AGARTHA

What lays hidden in the centre of the Earth? For believers in the Hollow Earth theory there is an inhabitable space beneath our feet. One theory is that this is the home of Agartha – a land populated by advanced humans. Believers say the legend of Agartha dates back to pre-Hindu tales of a race who lived on an island but moved their civilisation underground to avoid a cataclysm. The race flourished and uses tunnels connected to all continents.

Legends about Agartha were unknown in Europe until it was mentioned in an occult book in the late 19th century

CANTRE'R GWAELOD

In what is now Cardigan Bay in Wales it is said that there was once the kingdom of Cantre'r Gwaelod. The sea was held back by mighty walls that had sluice gates that were opened to let water flow away. One day the keeper the keeper of the gates got drunk and left them open. The whole land drowned as the tide swept in. Today at low tide the stumps of trees from an ancient forest emerge from the water which some believe to be the remains of Cantre'r Gwaelod.

Also known as the Lowland Hundred, was this Welsh kingdom swallowed by the sea?

THULE

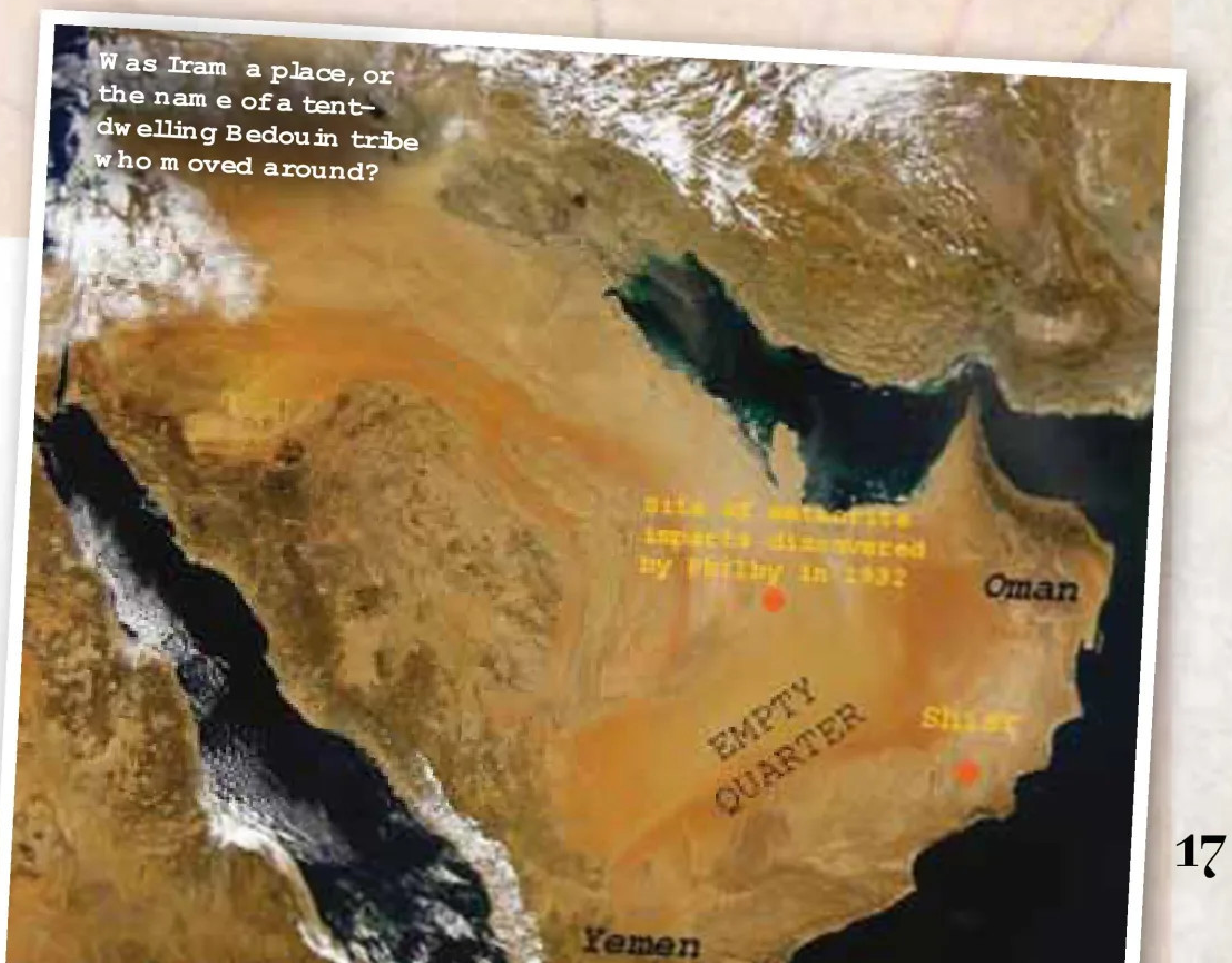
In the 4th century BCE a lost account of the Greek Pytheas described his visit to a land in the far north which he named Thule. He placed Thule six days sailing from the north of Britain. Later writers said that it was a place where the sun never set during midsummer, placing it within the Arctic circle. Many places have been proposed as Thule: Greenland, Iceland, Shetland, and the Orkney Isles.

·1936 - THULE - 1936·
· 25 ØRE ·

Today several Scandinavian and North Atlantic countries claim to be ancient Thule

IRAM OF THE PILLARS

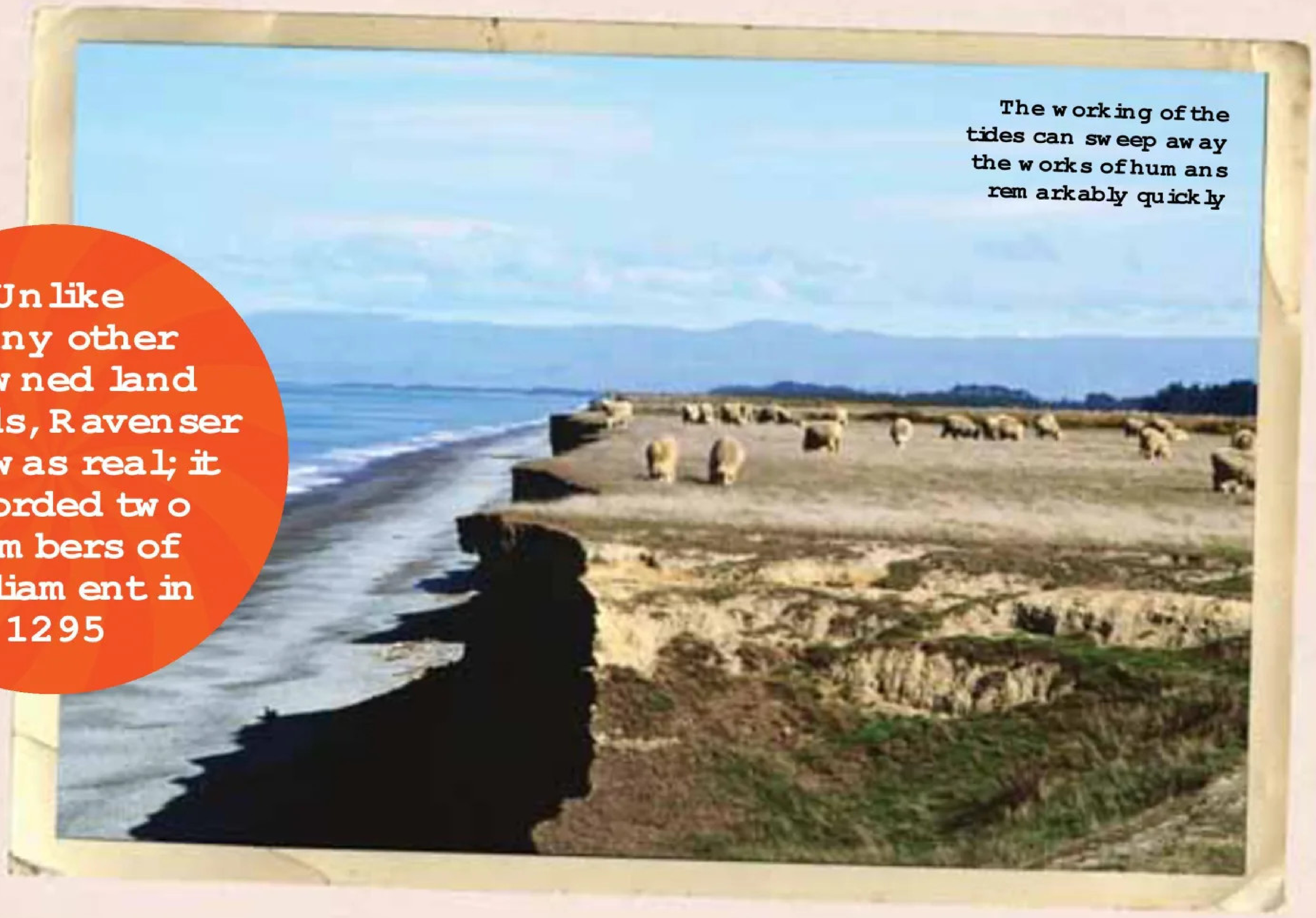
A city known as Iram of the Pillars is said to be buried under the sands of the Arabian desert. The Muslim holy book the Quran describes how God poured out destruction on a place known as "Iram – who had lofty pillars." Those who have scoured the sands for evidence of Iram have pointed to meteor impact craters and deep sinkholes as possible locations for the lost city.



Was Iram a place, or the name of a tent-dwelling Bedouin tribe who moved around?

RAVENSER ODD

The town that was washed away

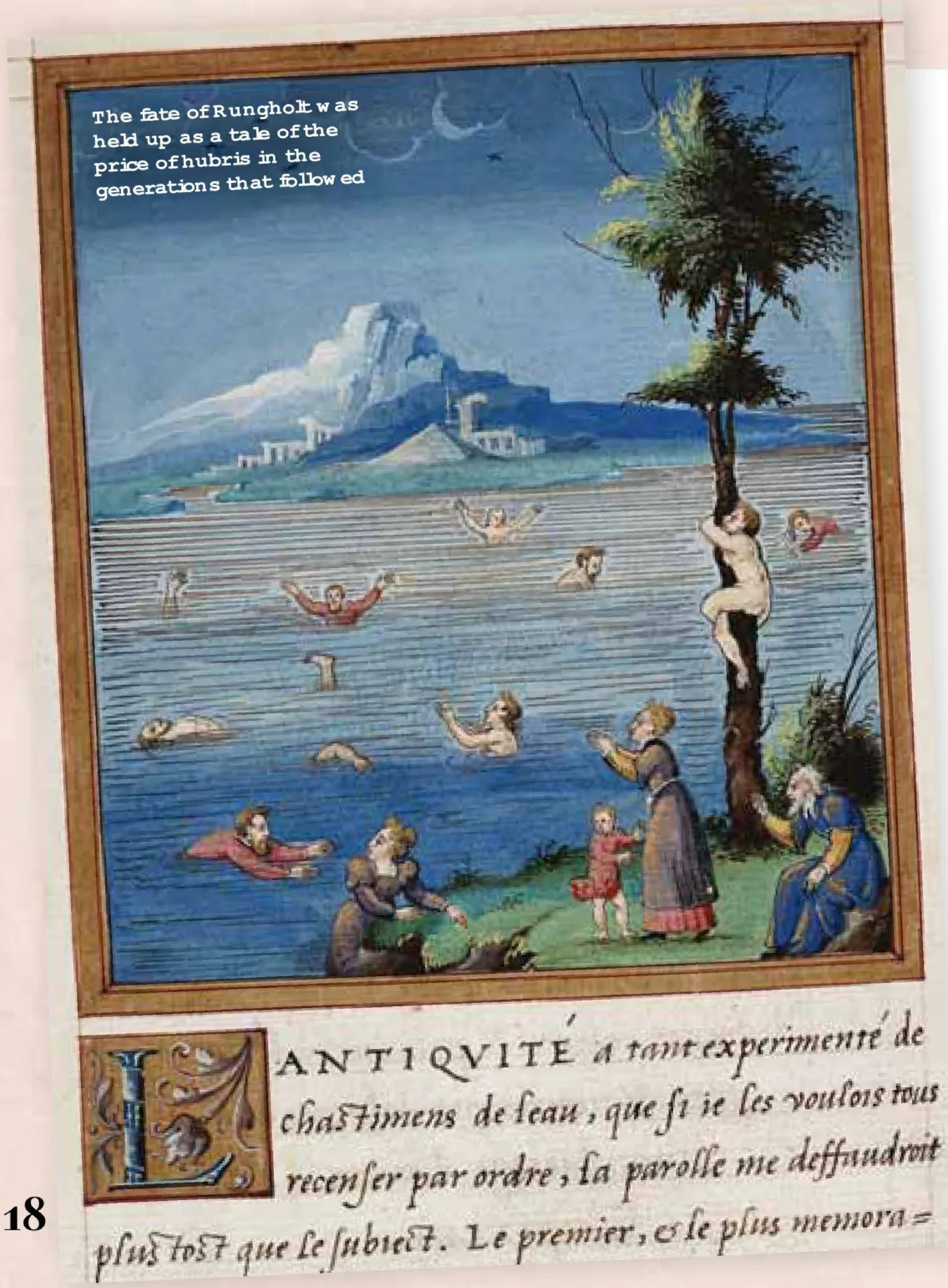


The working of the tides can sweep away the works of humans remarkably quickly

Unlike many other drowned land legends, Ravenser Odd was real; it recorded two Members of Parliament in 1295

In 1299 a prosperous town standing on the banks of the Humber river in England was granted a royal charter. It was known as Ravenser Odd, from 'Raven's Tongue', due to the shape of the peninsula it stood on. Sources speak of other towns becoming jealous of it stealing their profits. They must have cheered when the tides started to turn against the town.

The waves began to erode the land which Ravenser Odd stood on. By 1332 it was said that a third of the population had fled the steady washing away of their property. The town chapel was undercut by the sea and the bodies of the dead started to emerge. This was taken as a portent of doom. The end came with a huge storm tide called Saint Marcellus' Flood, or the Great Drowning of Men, in 1362. Ravenser Odd slipped forever beneath the sea and archaeologists are still searching for it, with a sonar survey research project held in 2022.



The fate of Rungholt was held up as a tale of the price of hubris in the generations that followed

LANTIQVITÉ a tant experimenté de chaſtimens de leau, que ſi ie les voulois tous recenſer par ordre, la parolle me deffaudroit plus toſt que le ſubiect. Le premier, & le plus memora=

RUNGHOLT

A town destroyed by the arrogance of its people, and the wild sea

For hundreds of years the people of Schleswig have told stories of the town of Rungholt and the fate the overtook it. Built on an island called Strand near to the coast it was once a thriving port town. Wealth flowed into the town from the ships that docked and this money was invested in dykes to drive the sea ever further back. Riches made the people arrogant, it is said and, during one storm, they openly mocked the sea and dared it to do its worst. This was the same storm of 1362 which drowned Ravenser Odd. The storm broke the dykes and inundated Rungholt, drowning it forever.

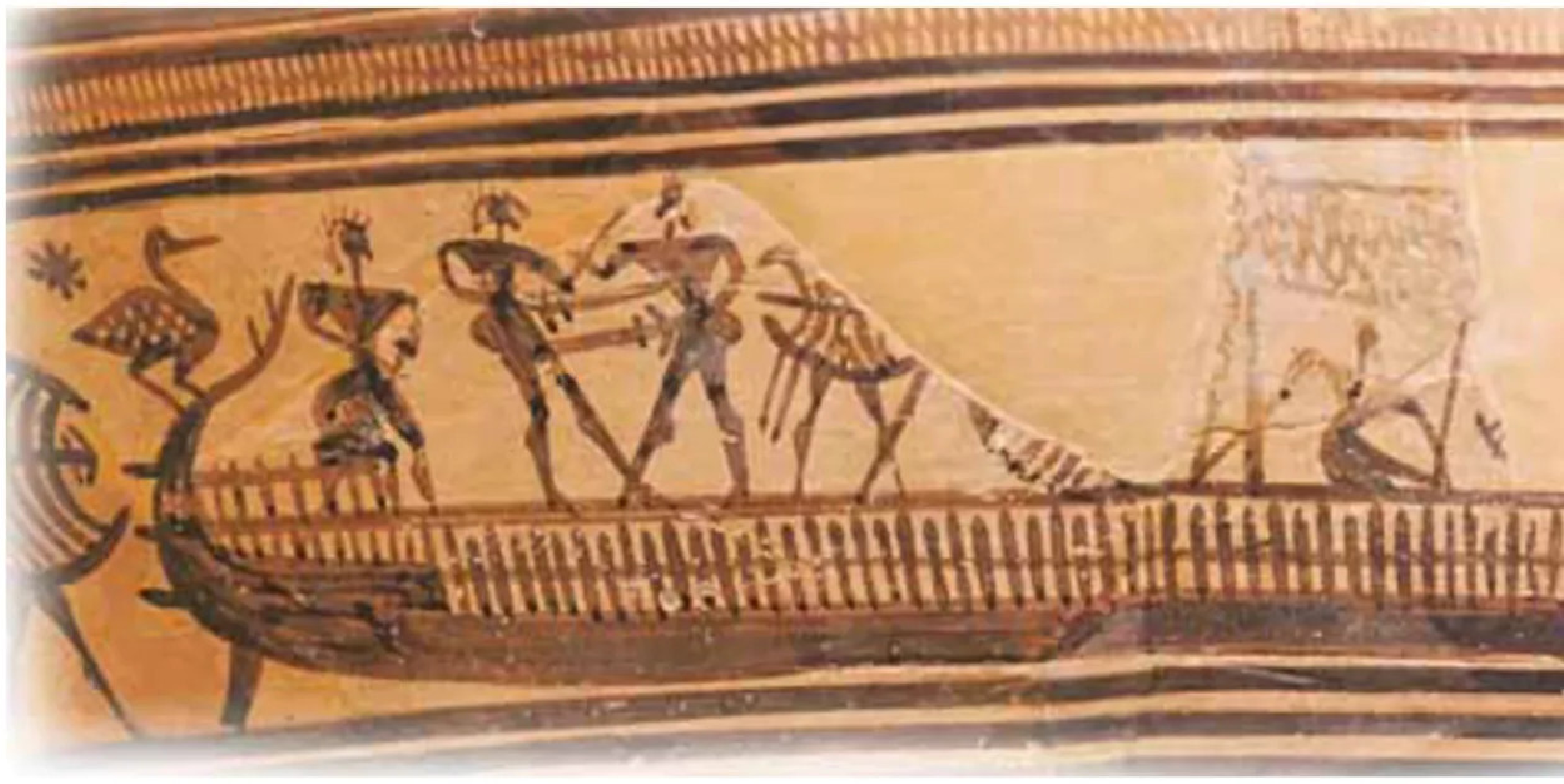
The sea was not done with Strand island. On 11 October 1634 a storm caused what is known as the Burchardi Flood. The coastline was shattered in many parts of Schleswig and by the time it receded most of Strand was gone.

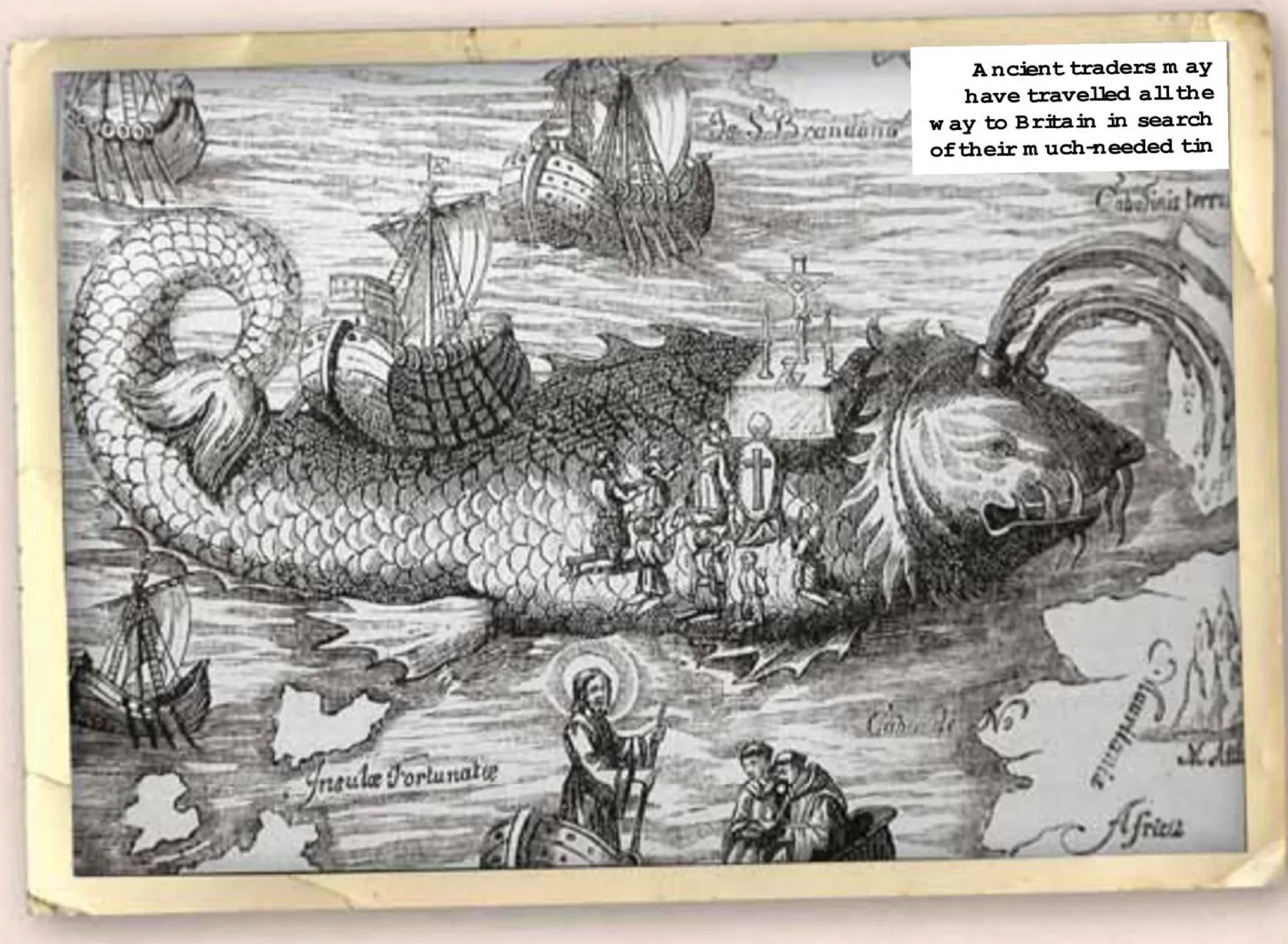
"This was the same storm of 1362 which also drowned the town of Ravenser Odd"

THE CASSITERIDES

The islands where the ancient world's tin was mined

Tin is vital for making bronze and so traders of the ancient world were willing to travel large distances to find it. The Greek historian Herodotus says that tin in his day was dug in the Cassiterides – the tin islands – but he did not know where they were. Later writers placed them to the north-west of Spain. To reach them, Mediterranean traders had to risk the rough seas of the Atlantic. One of the likely locations of the Cassiterides is Cornwall in Britain as it is rich in tin which has been mined there since antiquity.



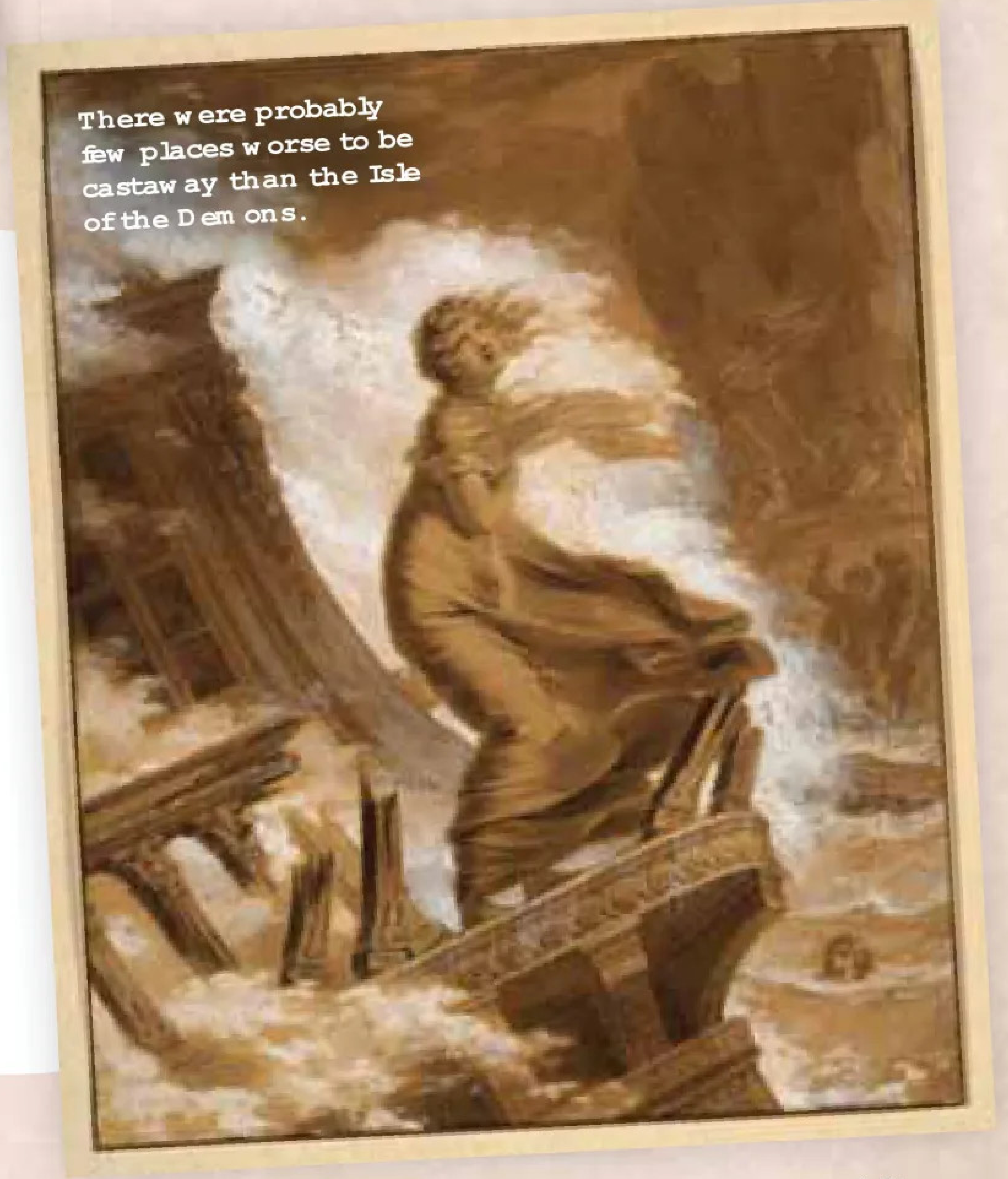


Ancient traders may have travelled all the way to Britain in search of their much-needed tin

ST BRENDAN'S ISLAND

A saint's attempts to find the Isle of the Blessed

Saint Brendan, known as The Navigator, lived in the 6th century and is said to have sailed into the Atlantic, evangelising to those he met while in search of the Isle of the Blessed, an ancient Greek legend reconceptualised in medieval Christian belief as a holy paradise. He saw many amazing sights and said he managed to locate the island, where he stopped to say mass. For hundreds of years it was marked on maps, though no one could agree exactly where it was. Various locations have been suggested from close to Ireland, to Madeira, to the Azores. As late as the 1770s sailors were recording sightings of St Brendan's Island, but no one has reliably identified it yet.



There were probably few places worse to be castaway than the Isle of the Demons.

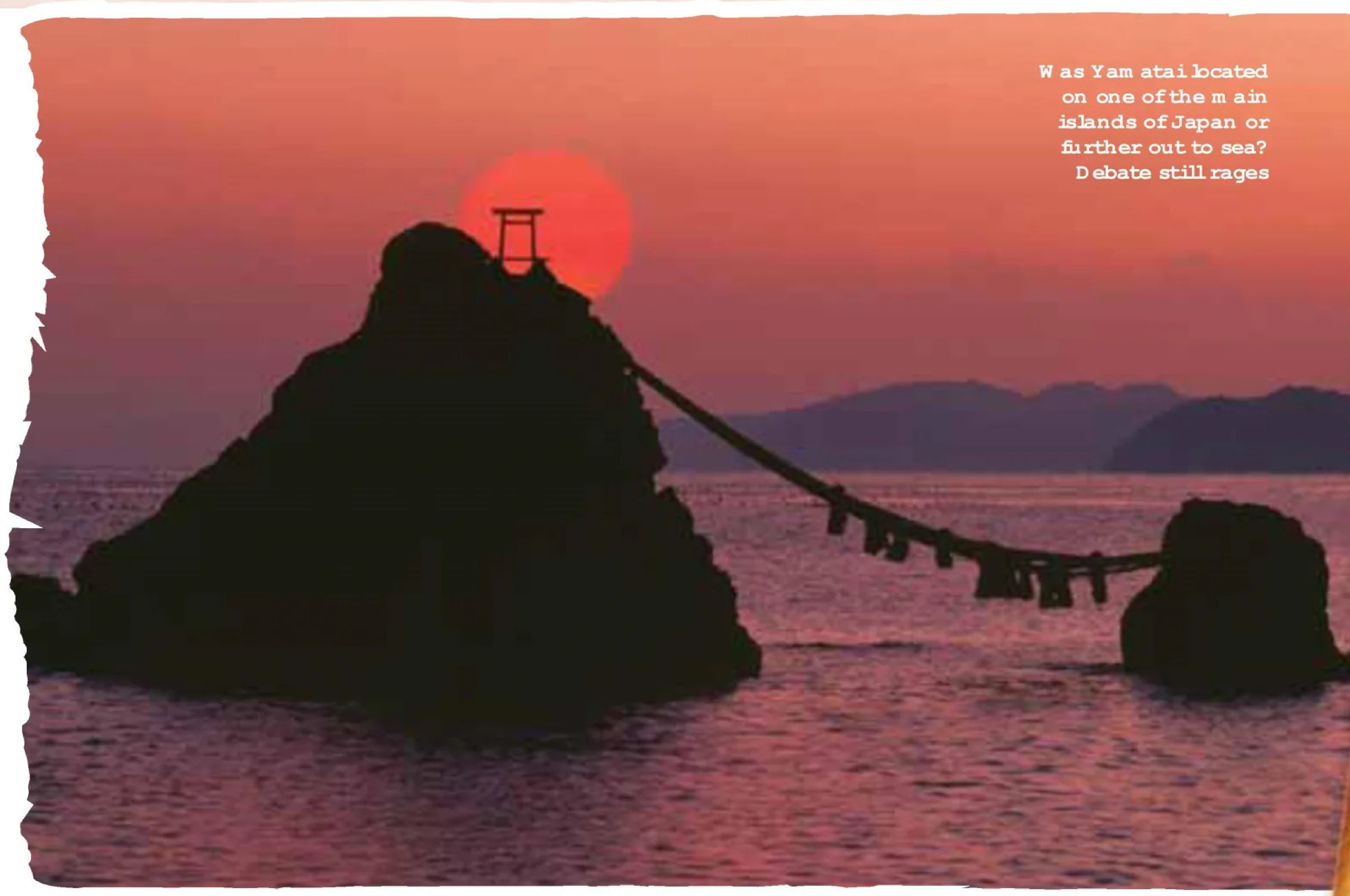
THE ISLE OF DEMONS

Shunned by sailors and beset by evil spirits

Off the coast of Newfoundland in North America many map makers of the 16th century placed a pair of islands which they named the Isle of Demons. Sailors avoided the place due to mysterious howling emanating from it and believed that it was home to malicious supernatural beings. When the French noblewoman Marguerite de La Rocque became pregnant by a common sailor she was marooned on the Isle of Demons by her uncle. Her child and lover died there but Marguerite was rescued. Given the unreliability of early maps it is not certain which island the Isle of Demons actually was.

YAMATAI

The legendary and lost kingdom of the dread sorceress Queen Himiko



Was Yamatai located on one of the main islands of Japan or further out to sea? Debate still rages

In ancient Chinese histories there are records of a queen called Himiko who ruled a land called Yamatai in Japan. Their records say that she came to power after 80 years of civil war which ravaged the land when her people elected her queen. They also say she ruled by sorcery and bewitched her subjects from inside a highly fortified palace. Following Himiko's death she was buried in a mound alongside 100 of her closest servants. The kingdom of Yamatai disappeared from history soon afterwards. The Chinese records also give directions for reaching Yamatai that do not seem to match up with Japanese geography.

Where precisely was Yamatai? This is one of the most hotly debated topics in Japanese history. Some scholars place it on the island of Kyushu while others favour Honshu. There are also some who say Himiko ruled from one of the islands in the area known as the Devil's Sea south of Japan.

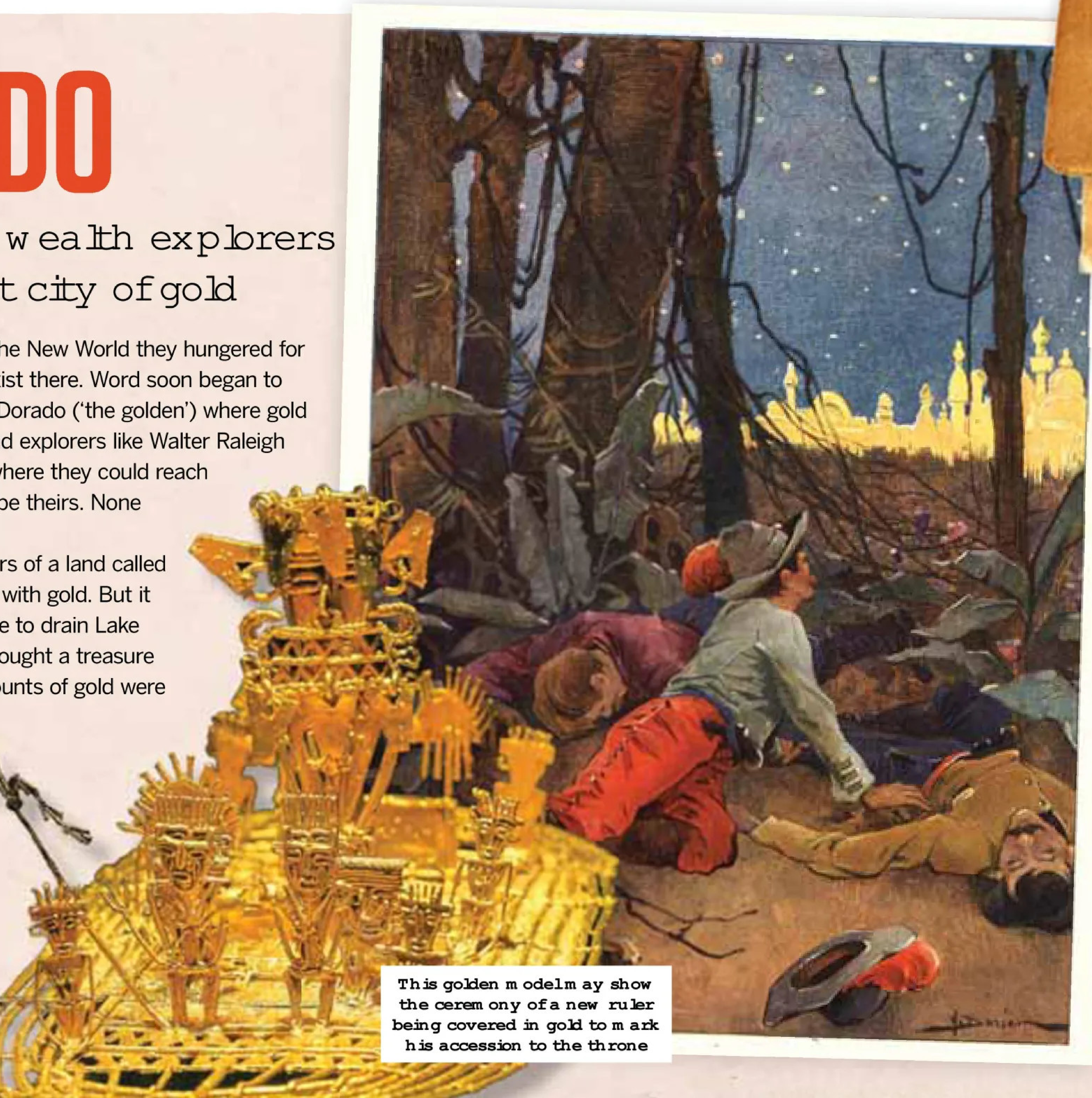
EL DORADO

Driven by a lust for wealth explorers searched for the lost city of gold

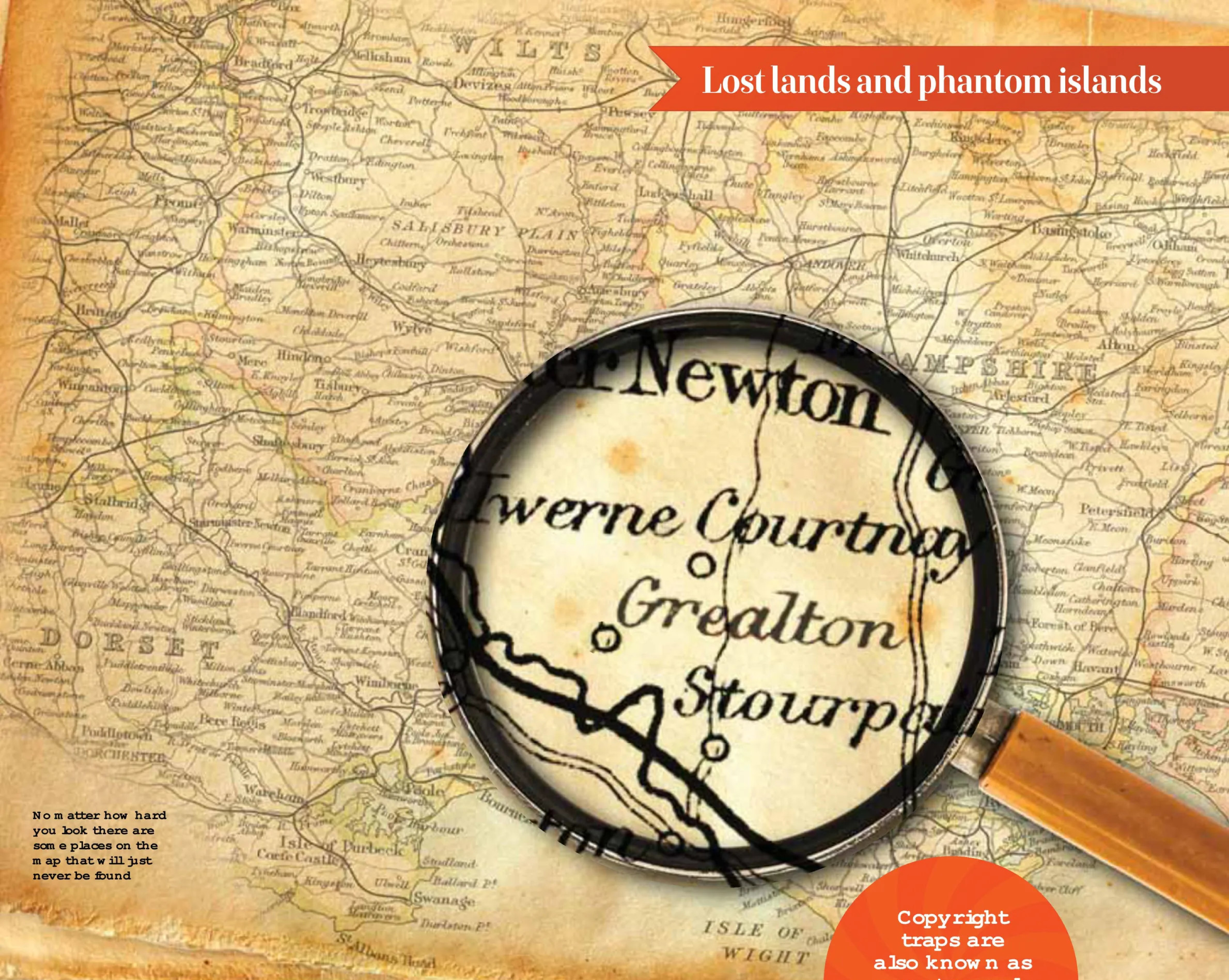
From the moment Europeans arrived in the New World they hungered for the gold and jewels they thought must exist there. Word soon began to spread about a city, or country, called El Dorado ('the golden') where gold was a common as dirt. Conquistadors and explorers like Walter Raleigh searched Venezuela, Colombia, and anywhere they could reach in pursuit of the untold riches that could be theirs. None found it.

Many of the gold hunters heard rumours of a land called Meta or Metza where temples were filled with gold. But it always eluded them. Attempts were made to drain Lake Guatavita in the Andes because it was thought a treasure of gold was hidden there. Only small amounts of gold were ever recovered.

There was a real El Dorado but it was a person not a place. When the leader of the Muisca people was anointed he was covered in gold dust and rowed to a lake to wash it off. He was the golden one, the El Dorado.



This golden model may show the ceremony of a new ruler being covered in gold to mark his accession to the throne



No matter how hard you look there are some places on the map that will just never be found

Copyright traps are also known as mountweazels after a fictional character in an encyclopaedia

PAPER TOWNS

Why cartographers put towns on maps when there's nothing there

If you follow the map produced by Otto G Lindberg and Ernest Alpers in 1930 of New York State it should not be too difficult to find the town of Agloe. It is very clearly marked. Yet visitors will be disappointed. There is no Agloe and there never was. In fact the name was made up, from the initials of the cartographers, as a way to ensure that no one copied their map. Mapmakers create these paper towns, or phantom settlements, to catch out unscrupulous copycats. If anyone plagiarised their map they would be able to point to Agloe as proof. This can be a real problem. In 2001 the Automobile Association in Britain paid Ordinance Survey £20 million when it was caught copying their maps.

Often cartographers only insert small roads or streets into the maps to catch copiers. Some have unsubtle names such as Lye Close. Other examples are Moat Lane in London and Oxygen Street in Edinburgh.

Paper towns may be rarer but can be found in many maps and usually involve small villages and settlements that no one would want to go to anyway. Even the omniscient Google Maps seems to have phantom settlements. At one time searches for Argleton would direct users to an empty patch of fields in England. Was this an attempt to trap anyone using their data? Some users pointed out that Argleton is an anagram of "Not real G" – where G could be the initial for Google. Google itself merely described it as a mistake.

The internet has come to love the concept of paper towns. German users have popularised the idea that the (genuine) city of Bielefeld does not exist and is the product of a conspiracy to make people believe it is real.

Images source: Getty, Wiki

THE REAL TREASURE ISLAND

The hunt for treasure on Oak Island has claimed the lives of six and the fortunes of many – but what even lies beneath the soil of this treacherous patch of land?

WRITTEN BY **ALICE PATTILLO**

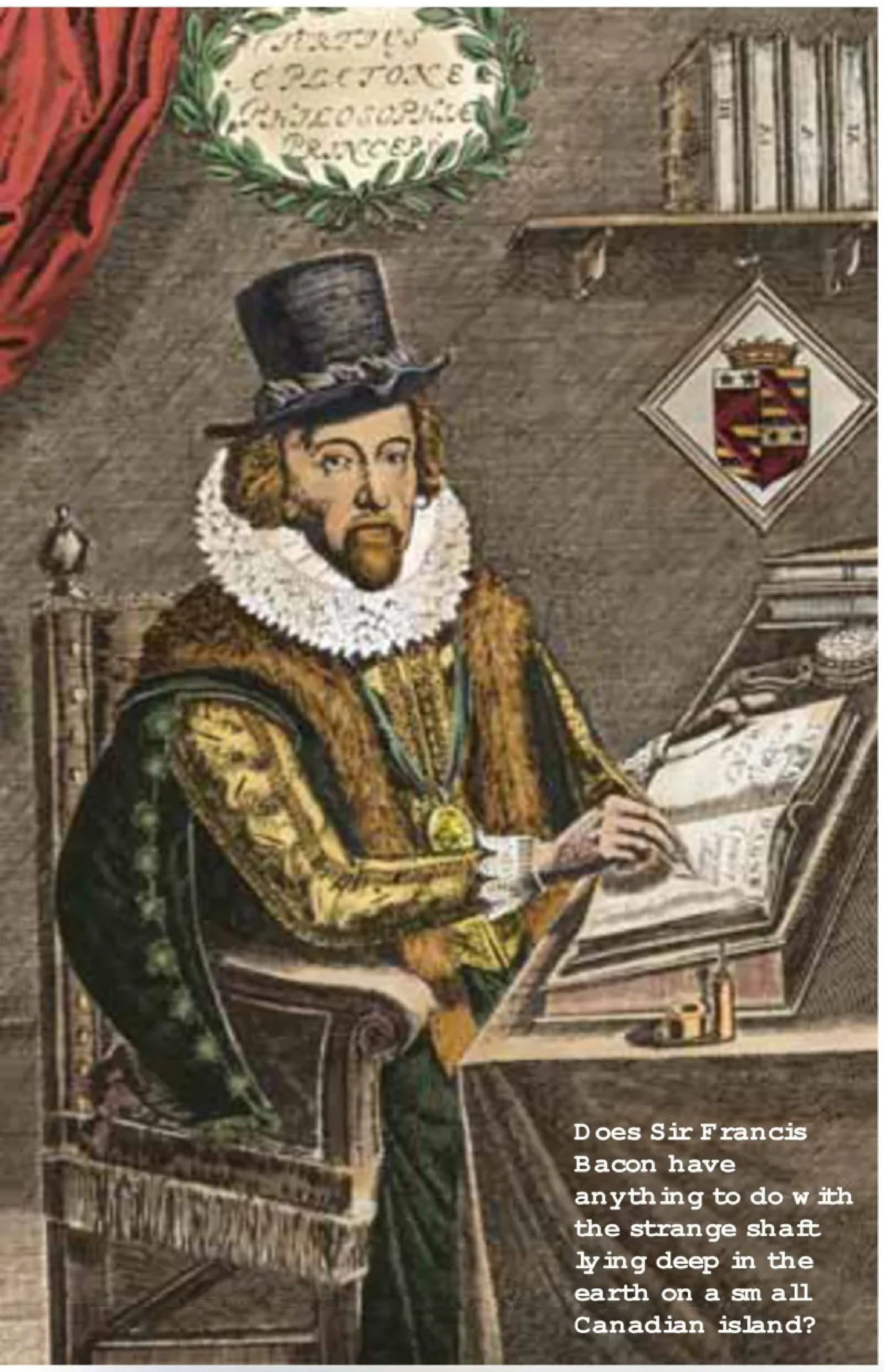
Just off the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia, eastern Canada, in Mahone Bay, about 45 miles southwest of the provincial capital of Halifax, sits a small island shrouded in legend and lore. Oak Island is not quite a mile long, and less than half a mile wide, connected to the mainland by a causeway built in 1965, and made up, mostly, of swamps and marsh, but that hasn't stopped it from being one of Canada's most enduring mysteries.

Oak Island is one of 350 small islands within Mahone Bay, but it is one of the largest and located barely 200 yards from the mainland. The east side of the island is composed of the porous rocks limestone, gypsum and sandstone while the west is, by contrast, mostly made up of quartzite and slate with the wetland separating the extremities leading to theories that the island was once two, conjoined by nature or the work of man. The island's name derives from it being the only one in the area home to an impressive forest of mature red oak trees. These magnificent trees once engulfed the land mass and would have been a stunning spectacle for early European settlers. Unfortunately, the oak population was later decimated in the 19th Century thanks to an infestation of black ants. These lush thickets would have felt mystical and eerie without the added mystery now associated with the island – and perhaps that's exactly why the legend exists. In fact, the citizens of the nearby township of Chester had shared tales of "strange lights" appearing on the island after dark. Similarly, numerous local fishermen had reported mysterious human figures "silhouetted against bonfires" spotted on the isle. This led to two men venturing out to Oak Island to investigate, only to never be seen again.

BURIED TREASURE?

But it is in 1795 that the myth that would captivate the world was initially established. The story begins with a teenage boy by the name of

A strange hole on this small Nova Scotian island has been bewildering adventure seekers for centuries



Does Sir Francis Bacon have anything to do with the strange shaft lying deep in the earth on a small Canadian island?

Daniel McGinnis. The 16-year-old had rowed to the east side of Oak Island early one spring morning with the spirit of adventure. Some sources say he was accompanied by two friends, Anthony Vaughn and John Smith, others say his pals joined him later, but the general consensus is that McGinnis hadn't been exploring the island long when he came across a bizarre 13 foot saucer-shaped depression in the earth within a clearing, with evidence that the pit was man-made. The forked branch of an oak tree extended directly above the curious crater and, allegedly, hosted a tackle block, attached by a wooden peg. Upon witnessing the strange set up McGinnis surmised one thing – this must be the site of buried treasure. What other explanation could there be? He immediately enlisted the help of Vaughn and Smith to investigate. When the boys attempted to remove the tackle block hanging from the oak branch it fell to the ground and crumbled into powder, indicating some significant age. Next, McGinnis, Vaughn and Smith went to town on the hollowed ground with pickaxes and shovels, digging two feet down until they hit a layer of flagstones that appeared to have been laid there. After tossing the stones aside, the trio discovered a the entrance to a shaft, the walls of which were made from hard, packed clay. They shoveled the loose earth from within the shaft, labouring for a few days before striking solid wood about ten feet down. What the boys mistook for a treasure chest was actually a small platform formed by logs. Aided with a rope and a bucket, the lads continued to dig and discard the loose soil for another ten feet until hitting solid wood once again – another level platform of logs. It was at this point, 20 feet down, surrounded by walls of clay, that the teens decided they needed help or would potentially wind up buried alive. They eventually decided to buy land upon the island, supporting themselves as farmers and spending their spare time seeking out others to help them upon their quest: to unearth what they believed was Captain Kidd's treasure.

THE CURSE OF THE MONEY PIT

Within the next ten years, the word of potential treasure had spread throughout the province. Prominent men had taken an interest in the promise of hidden riches, and decided to form a company for the purpose of finding the elusive treasure. Enlisting the help of specialist equipment, the pit was excavated a further 75 feet, with wooden logs found marking every ten foot drop. At 90 feet down there was a flat slab of rock with markings etched into it, which was interpreted as meaning "forty feet below two million pounds buried" by an expert in Halifax.

Numerous famous people have joined in the hunt for gold on Oak Island, including Franklin D Roosevelt

At approximately 90 feet a wooden platform was discovered, spanning the entire shaft, but when the men returned to work two days after making this discovery, the hole was found filled with 30 feet of water despite there being no signs of moisture before. An elaborate booby trap, perhaps? They tried to no avail to drain out this phantom water but after days of work it was decided to dig a new duct next to the original one and attempt to tunnel underneath the old shaft to locate the treasure. The new shaft was dug successfully, but when they began tunneling beneath the original they were met with a sudden flood of water yet again, the men barely escaping with their lives. The company soon pulled out from the treacherous treasure seeking.

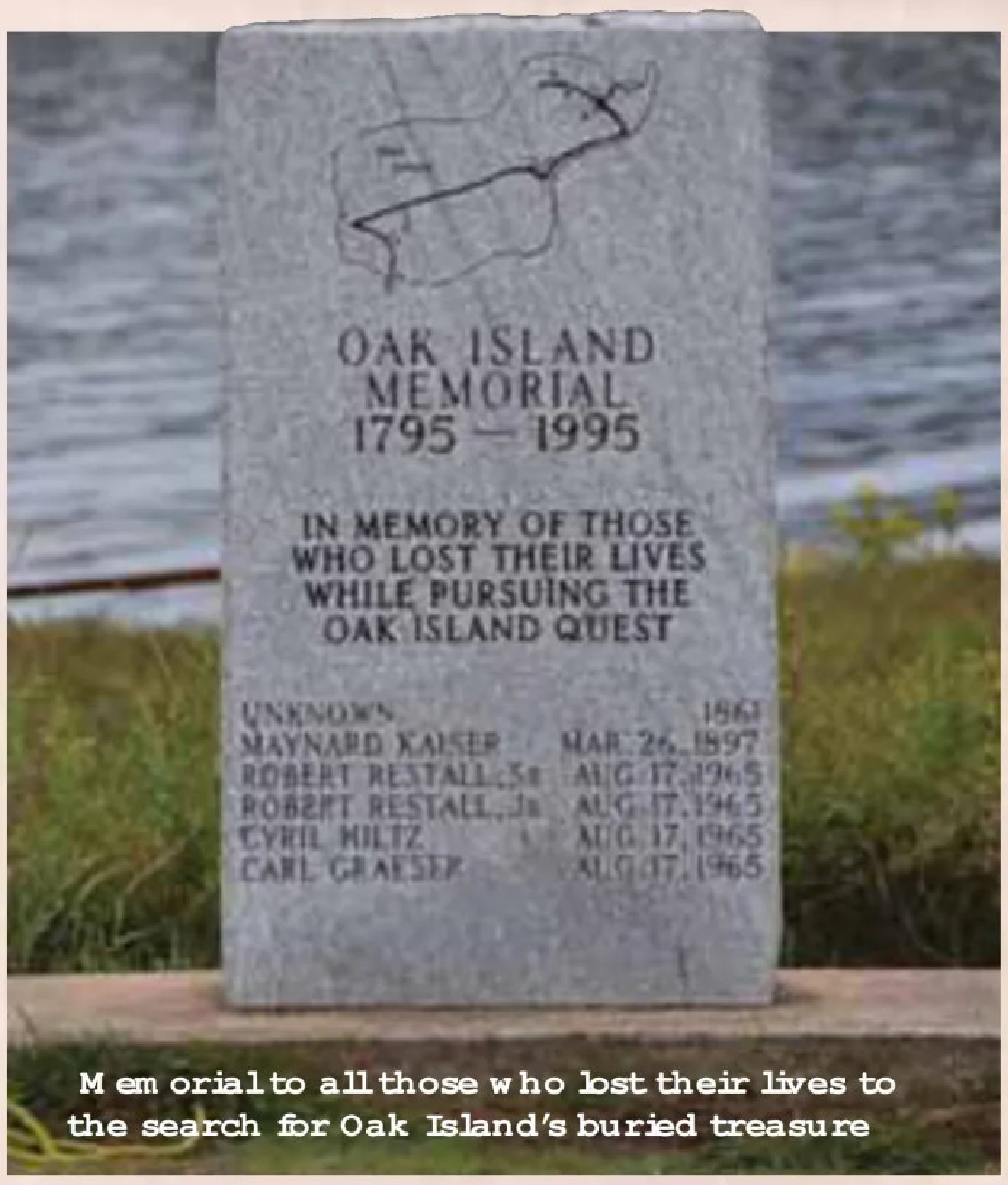
By the mid-19th century, the treasure hunt on Oak Island had caught on. In 1849, Vaughn returned to the original pit, but water was struck at 86 feet down. Again the water wouldn't shift. Another effort was made with another group of men who drilled bore holes and discovered the platform found by the team almost half a century earlier was made of spruce. After drilling through they found layers of oak, metal, more spruce, clay and even coconut fibres. A third shaft was dug with the same intention as the second but again was flooded with seawater. This same pattern repeated with numerous excavation attempts made by a variety of companies. Some efforts even resulted in the collapse of the platforms, hurling any prospective treasure further down into the ground. The original shaft was quickly dubbed the Money Pit due to the extensive amount of capital that had been invested into excavating the hole, but despite this, avid treasure seekers endured with the elusive shaft and nearby cave, Smith's Cove, attracting a constant flow of investigators consistently for over 200 years – one party of explorers even included US president Franklin D Roosevelt.

The cost of the hunt for gold on Oak Island hasn't been just losses in finances. Legend has it that seven men will die in the search before the treasure is found. So far six unfortunate souls have lost their lives in the pursuit of the speculated treasure. In 1861, a pump engine boiler burst, killing one man. In 1897 a worker by the name of Maynard Kaiser fell to his death. In 1965, the team reported on by *Reader's Digest* suffered four fatalities: Robert Restall, his 18-year-old son, his work partner Carl Graeser and another man who attempted to save the men, Cyrill Hiltz.

AN ENDURING ENIGMA

There have been allegations that McGinnis, Vaughn and Smith made up the story in order to cover up the fact that they'd already located the treasure or that the teenagers were fronting some conspiracy of Yankee loyalists who were running a smuggling operation out of Oak Island during the American Revolutionary War. But most treasure hunters have been on board with the boys' story and the suggestion that the treasure, if there is any, is that of a pirate. Other hypotheses of what treasure is hidden below the Money Pit include the missing jewels of the last French queen, Marie Antoinette, and other hoards of gold – from fleeing Incas and Aztecs to Spanish sailors and French Army engineers to profits of war. Some speculate that the treasure is in fact the stolen goods of St Andrews Cathedral.

The alleged marked stone discovered in the early 19th century along with other sigils said to have been found around Oak Island have given rise to theories of the pit being a Masonic "secret vault" – part of an initiation rite. These claims have also spawned the theory that the pit may even contain the Holy Grail or the Ark of the Covenant, buried by exiled Knights Templar members. Similarly, others believe that the Rosicrucians – reportedly led by Sir Francis Bacon – could have hidden a legendary vault beneath the earth on the island. According to some, Bacon was the true author of Shakespeare's works and so some of his forgotten manuscripts are said to be buried deep below the dirt.


OAK ISLAND
MEMORIAL
1795 — 1995
IN MEMORY OF THOSE
WHO LOST THEIR LIVES
WHILE PURSUING THE
OAK ISLAND QUEST
UNKNOWN 1861
MAYNARD KAISER MAR. 26, 1897
ROBERT RESTALL, Sr. AUG. 17, 1965
ROBERT RESTALL, Jr. AUG. 17, 1965
CYRIL HILTZ AUG. 17, 1965
CARL GRAESER AUG. 17, 1965

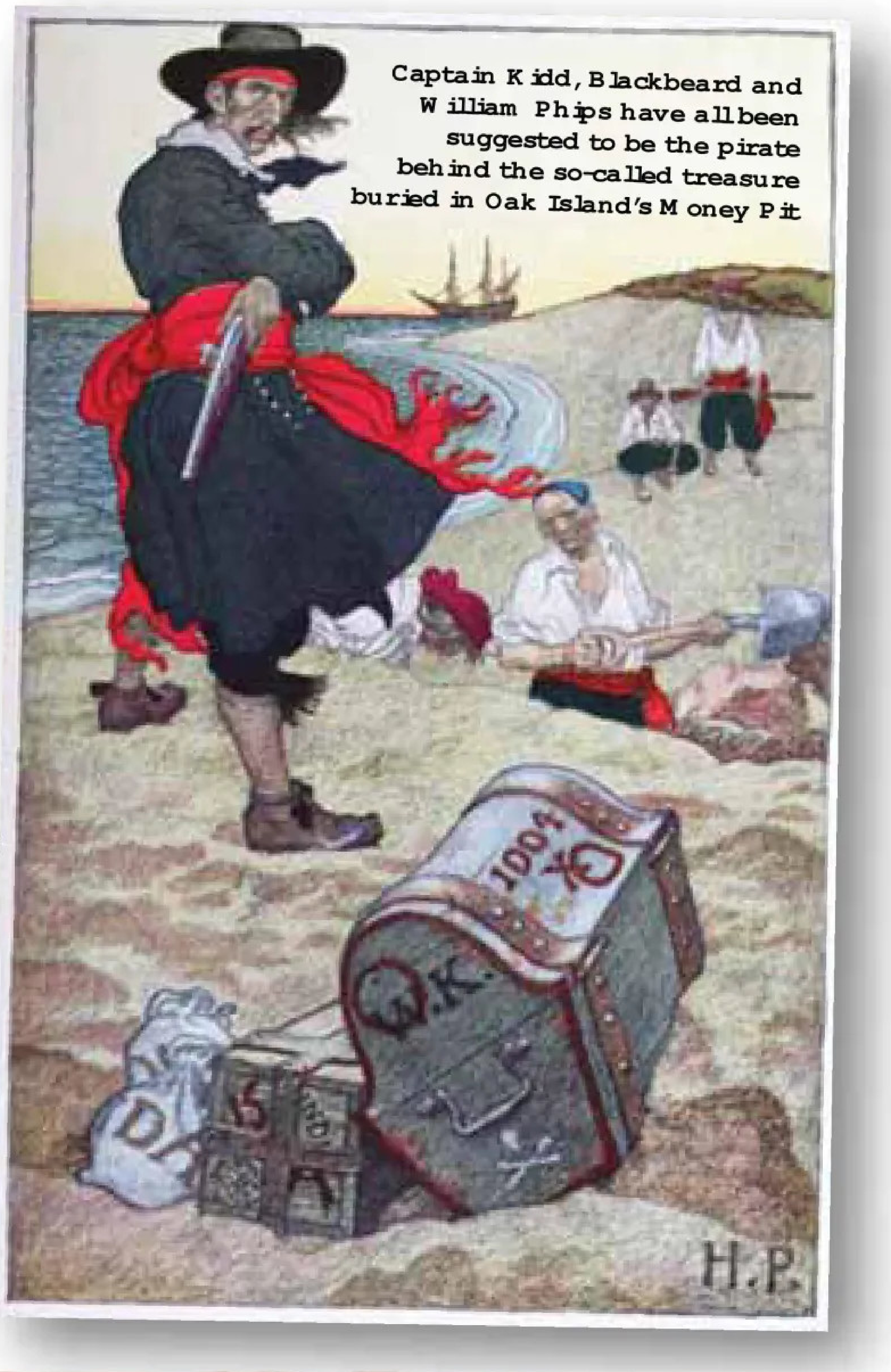
Memorial to all those who lost their lives to the search for Oak Island's buried treasure

Other explanations for the pit include the idea that it is actually an old tar kiln and not a site of treasure at all. The water that has deterred many intrepid explorers was previously claimed to have been an elaborate man-made drainage system, but more recent findings have suggested that its merely a natural phenomenon. So, perhaps the pit itself isn't a man-made structure at all, but simply a sink hole. Whatever the case, the mystery of Oak Island endures.

PIRATE BOOTY?

When McGinnis discovered what has since been dubbed 'The Money Pit', it was mere decades since the height of piracy and buccaneering. Mahone Bay had been known as one of the world's pirate havens and tales of buried treasure were rife in the region.

Captain Kidd was a successful Scottish privateer of the golden age of piracy and was known to have buried a cache of treasure on Gardiners Island – just off the coast of Long Island, New York, not too far from Nova Scotia. After being captured in Boston in 1699 he was sent to Newgate Prison and hung in 1701. He was known to have had more treasure than what was discovered and used as evidence in his trial. It's debated if Kidd spend enough time in Nova Scotia to construct such an elaborate dugout for his ill-gotten gains. Another pirate theory is that the buried treasure is not that of Captain Kidd but the notorious Blackbeard, who was said to have claimed that he stowed away his riches "where none but Satan and myself can find it". Was that Oak Island?



Captain Kidd, Blackbeard and William Phips have all been suggested to be the pirate behind the so-called treasure buried in Oak Island's Money Pit

Images source: Alamy

THE BUILDING OF CORAL CASTLE

Built to mend a broken heart, does Florida's Coral Castle contain mystical secrets that have yet to be decoded?

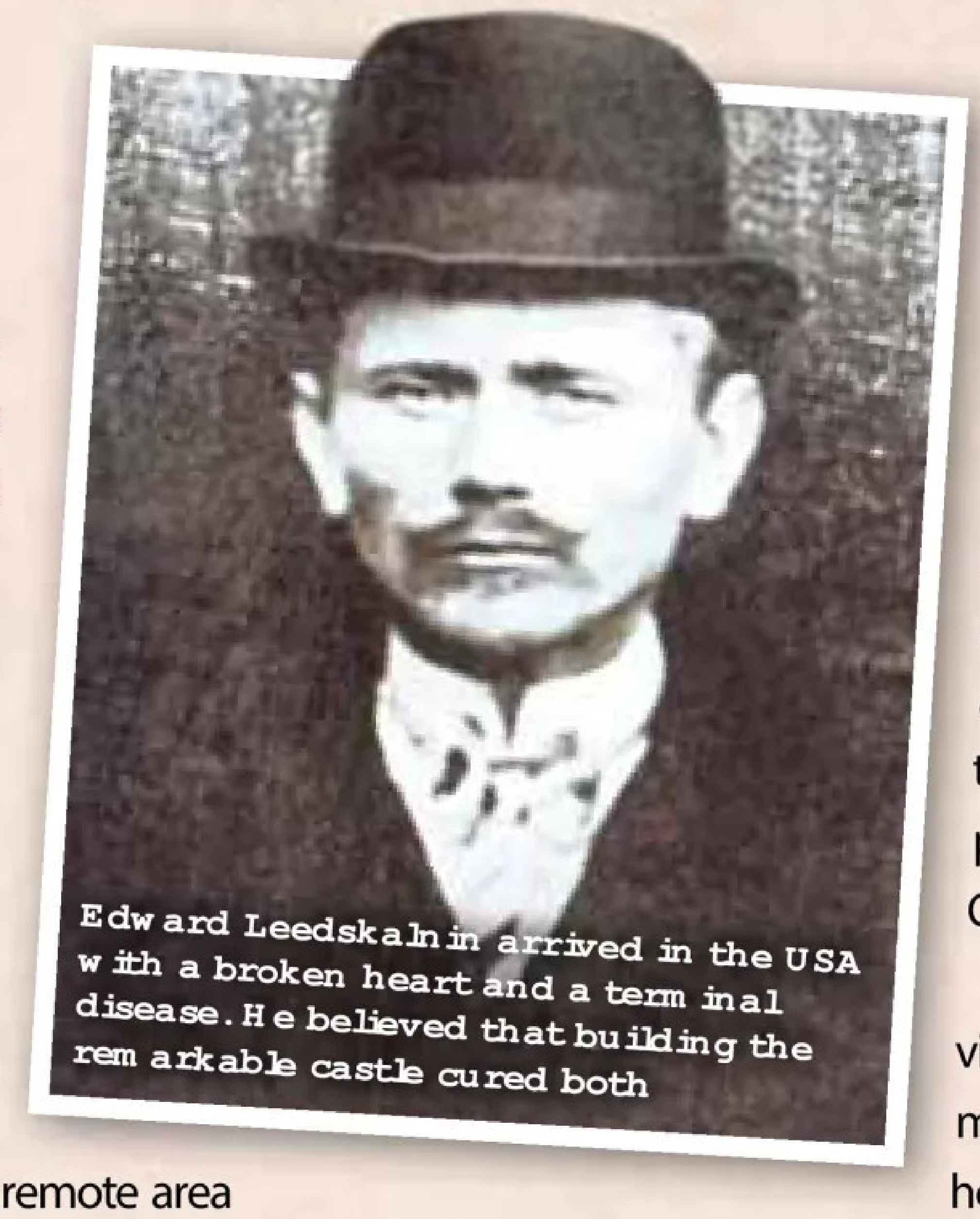
WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

The monuments and structures of Coral Castle were built by one man, without help or machinery. He never revealed the secrets of his methods

Images source: Barry Haynes, Wiki

The building of Coral Castle

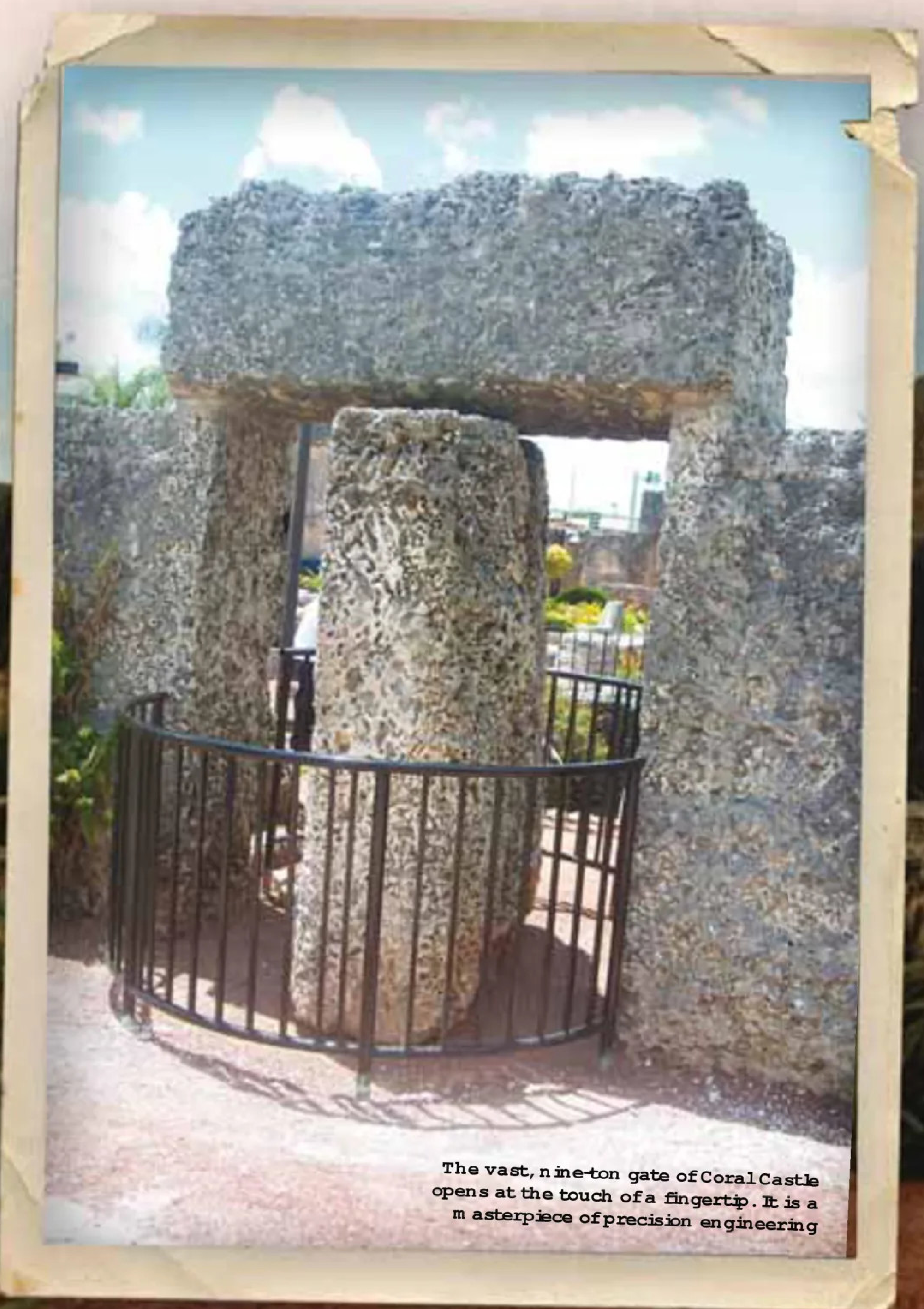
When 26-year-old Edward Leedskalnin arrived in the USA from his native Latvia just before World War I, his future looked bleak. He had been rejected by his fiancée and was suffering from tuberculosis, then a terminal disease, and he believed that his days were numbered.


Edward Leedskalnin arrived in the USA with a broken heart and a terminal disease. He believed that building the remarkable castle cured both

Leedskalnin travelled to Florida, where he began work on a castle. He deliberately chose a remote area to ensure his privacy but, when civilisation began to move closer, he purchased a new parcel of land and began the laborious process of moving his original structures and continuing his work on what became Coral Castle. For nearly 30 years, Leedskalnin worked on in solitude, refusing to allow anyone to watch him work, but allowing visitors to view the castle for a small donation. The castle is a masterpiece of construction and is actually made out of oolite, a sedimentary rock. Remarkably, the stones are held together without any bonding agent. It is their weight and precision placement that keeps Coral Castle standing.

As Coral Castle grew, visitors became ever more desperate to learn how one slightly-built man had achieved such a feat without any heavy machinery or assistance. Leedskalnin told them simply that it was easy when one knew how, or even teased that he had learned the secrets of the pyramid builders. He refused to give anything else away other than the tantalising suggestion that he employed perpetual motion. As interest grew, legends began to spring up around the eccentric builder, including one that he was able to move the enormous blocks of coral as though they were weightless.

Leedskalnin understood the value of self-promotion and declared that the magnetic properties of the castle had cured his terminal illness. He died in 1951, but Coral Castle is a monument to his life. Visitors to the site still seek answers as to how he was able to move the vast blocks into place with such precision, and myths have sprung up including the belief that he was able to do so by means of telekinesis or even singing to the stones, whilst still other theories posit that Leedskalnin somehow harnessed the power of the Earth itself, drawing energy from ley lines that allowed him to move the blocks with ease. Yet whether it's mathematics or magnetism, Coral Castle is a tantalising mystery waiting to be solved. Perhaps Leedskalnin has left behind a logic puzzle, but maybe it is a spell book; whatever the answer, the solution to Coral Castle's construction has yet to be discovered.


The vast, nine-ton gate of Coral Castle opens at the touch of a fingertip. It is a masterpiece of precision engineering

Images source: Wiki

HOUSES OF HORROR

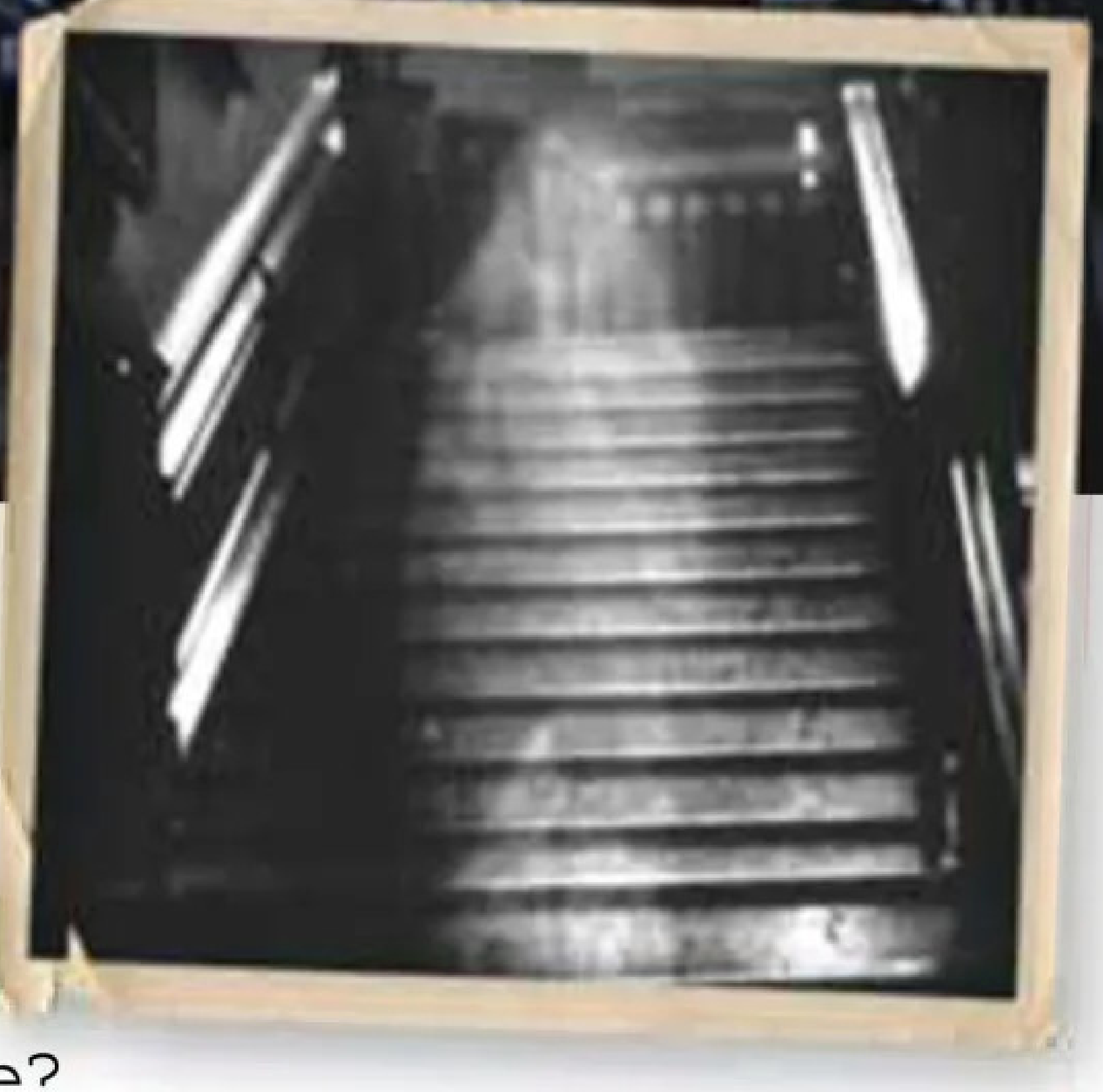
From the sites of grisly and unsolved murders to tales of unquiet spirits roaming their former homes, haunted and horrible houses are packed with supernatural mysteries

WRITTEN BY **APRIL MADDEN**

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM **MELANIE CLEGG, JOANNA ELPHICK AND MIKE HASKEW**

The reasons for a house to be considered 'haunted' are many. Some are simply run down and dilapidated for so long that they form part of local lore. Others are the sites of dreadful crimes or incidents throughout history.

Some so-called haunted buildings are believed to generate emanations that parapsychologists and ghost-hunters can track using their equipment or their claimed psychic powers. Sceptics dismiss these as hoaxes or subconscious autosuggestion. It's been theorised that some supposedly spook-infested locations in fact have elevated levels of the chemicals found in pesticides, or of carbon monoxide – levels not high enough to kill but that could produce hallucinatory effects like unexplained sadness, chest pressure, tiredness and headaches, auditory hallucinations, and nerve sensations like shivers, temperature changes, pin-like pains throughout the body, and phantom touches. This is known as Haunted House Syndrome, and offers a possible explanation as to why the Victorian era, when homes were illuminated by gas lamps, was the golden age of haunting reporting.



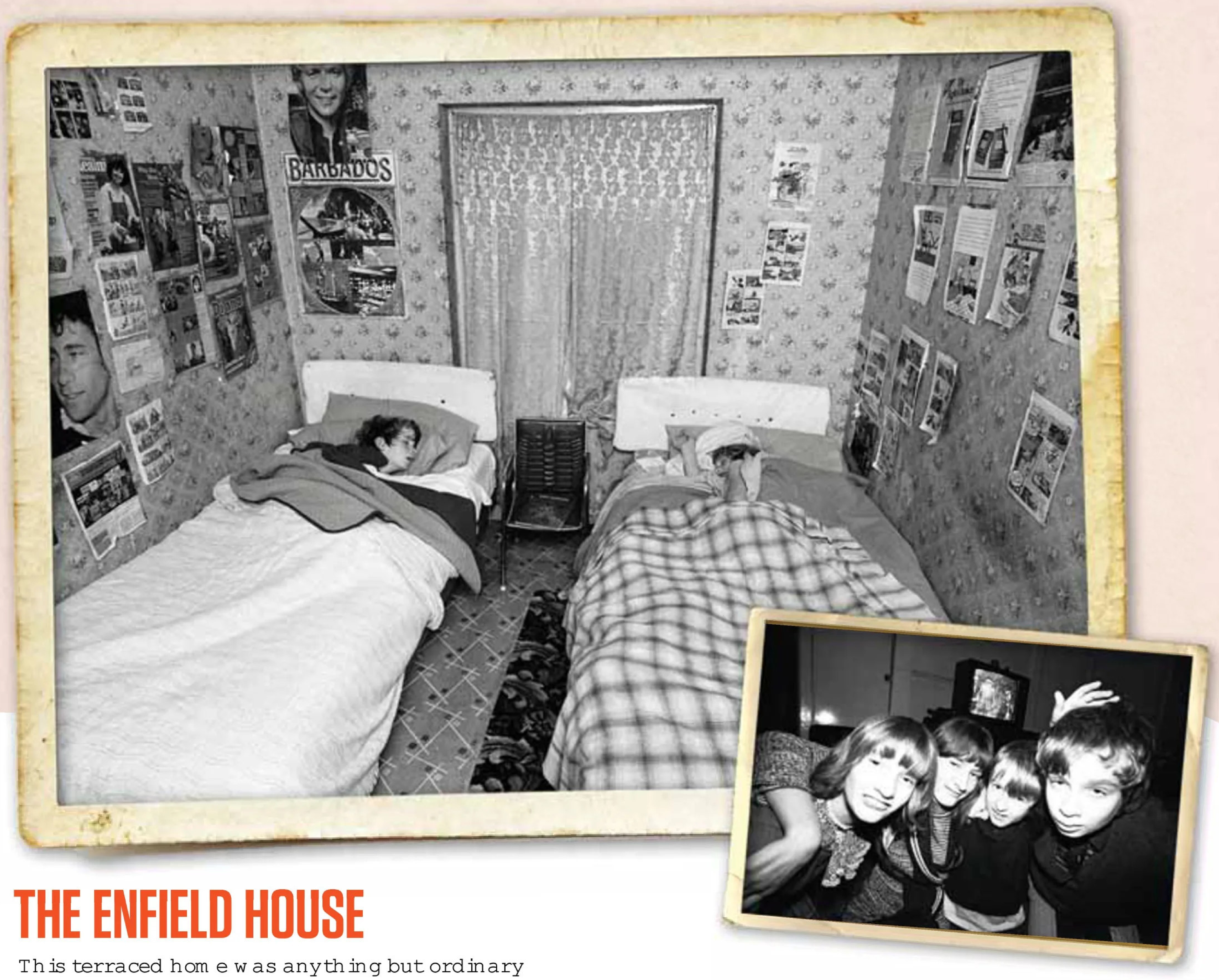
RAYNHAM HALL

The location of the first ever 'ghost photo' – but what did the camera see?

Although some have claimed that the famous photograph of a ghostly entity floating down the stairs of Raynham Hall is nothing more than a cunning fake, many more, including the renowned ghost hunter Harry Price, believe it to be the genuine article. Over the years the image has been reproduced in hundreds of books on the paranormal, but who is this luminary spectre and what is her story?

It is thought that the Brown Lady, so-called because of her chocolate-coloured brocade dress, is in fact the ghost of Lady Dorothy Walpole, the beautiful fun-loving second wife of Charles 'Turnip' Townsend. Despite having 11 children, it was an unhappy marriage, with Dorothy spending too much money on frocks and Charles unleashing his violent temper on a whim. When he discovered that his wife had had an affair with Lord Wharton before their marriage, Townsend locked his wife away. Her death remains somewhat of a mystery. Whilst she officially died of smallpox, many claimed at the time that she had been pushed down the stairs. Others whispered that she had been starved to death. In truth, she most likely died of a broken heart, longing for the children she was taken away from.

Either way, shortly after her death, her ghost was spotted drifting along the landing and down the great staircase by servants and visitors alike. Others claimed to have seen her standing beneath her portrait in one of the bedrooms. It seemed that, contrary to her gentle nature in life, in death, Dorothy's spirit was cruel and malevolent, resulting in the rapid departure of many members of staff. No more the beautiful mistress of the house, this hideous entity stared out blankly with dark hollow sockets rather than her previous sparkling eyes. Various famous guests, including King George IV, who refused to stay in 'this accursed house' ever again, and well-known author Captain Marryat, who fired a gun point-blank into her ghostly face, had terrifying encounters with her, but it wasn't until she was photographed by Captain Provand and Indra Shira that she became a true supernatural celebrity. Today, Raynham Hall continues to be troubled by her restless spirit maniacally searching for her children. The sound of whispers in the picture gallery and the rustling of silk skirts on the main staircase still startle guests, whilst weighty chairs are known to move by themselves.



THE ENFIELD HOUSE

This terraced home was anything but ordinary

There was obvious distress in Peggy Hodgson's voice when she called local police to her rented terrace home on 284 Green Street, where the single mother was raising four children.

As her kids prepared for bed that August evening in 1977, Peggy heard a strange noise upstairs. Thinking it was her daughters, 13-year-old Margaret and 11-year-old Janet, scuffling, she went to look and something terrifying happened. A heavy chest began sliding across the room, apparently without assistance. When Peggy began shoving it back, she met strong resistance from an unseen force. The chest moved a second time, faster. Aghast, Peggy and the girls fled.

When police officers arrived, they found nothing unusual – until they started to leave. Years later, one of them remembered a chair in the living room rising off the floor and moving across the room. After checking for wires and other unseen reasons for the episode, the police left. However, the Enfield Poltergeist did not. For months, the poltergeist wreaked havoc, apparently throwing objects and making noises.

As news of the phenomena leaked, sceptics accused the girls of being the source. In desperation, Peggy contacted the Society for Psychical Research. Two investigators, Guy Lyon Playfair and Maurice Grosse, responded, hiring a barrister, Mary Rose Barrington, to verify their research. During more than a year on the premises, the investigators recorded numerous incidents, including Playfair's encounter. He entered an upstairs room to find the entire Victorian-era fireplace ripped from the wall – hardly something the young girls were capable of. Witnesses saw Janet levitate, and she was dragged by an unknown entity from her bedroom and down the stairs. She also broke into disturbing fits of cursing, and an eerie voice was heard coming from her. When investigators posed questions, the voice replied that it belonged to a man named Bill. A record search revealed a man named Bill Wilkins had lived and died there.

Throughout the investigation, the girls were suspected of playing tricks, but they claimed that very few of the occurrences were their doing.

Thirty years after the events subsided, Janet told an interviewer, "I know from my own experience that it was real. It lived off me, off my energy." Although the sceptics persist, the poltergeist activity in Enfield remains largely unexplained. Today, the Enfield house is still a residential home, so please do not disturb the current residents.

THE WINCHESTER MYSTERY HOUSE

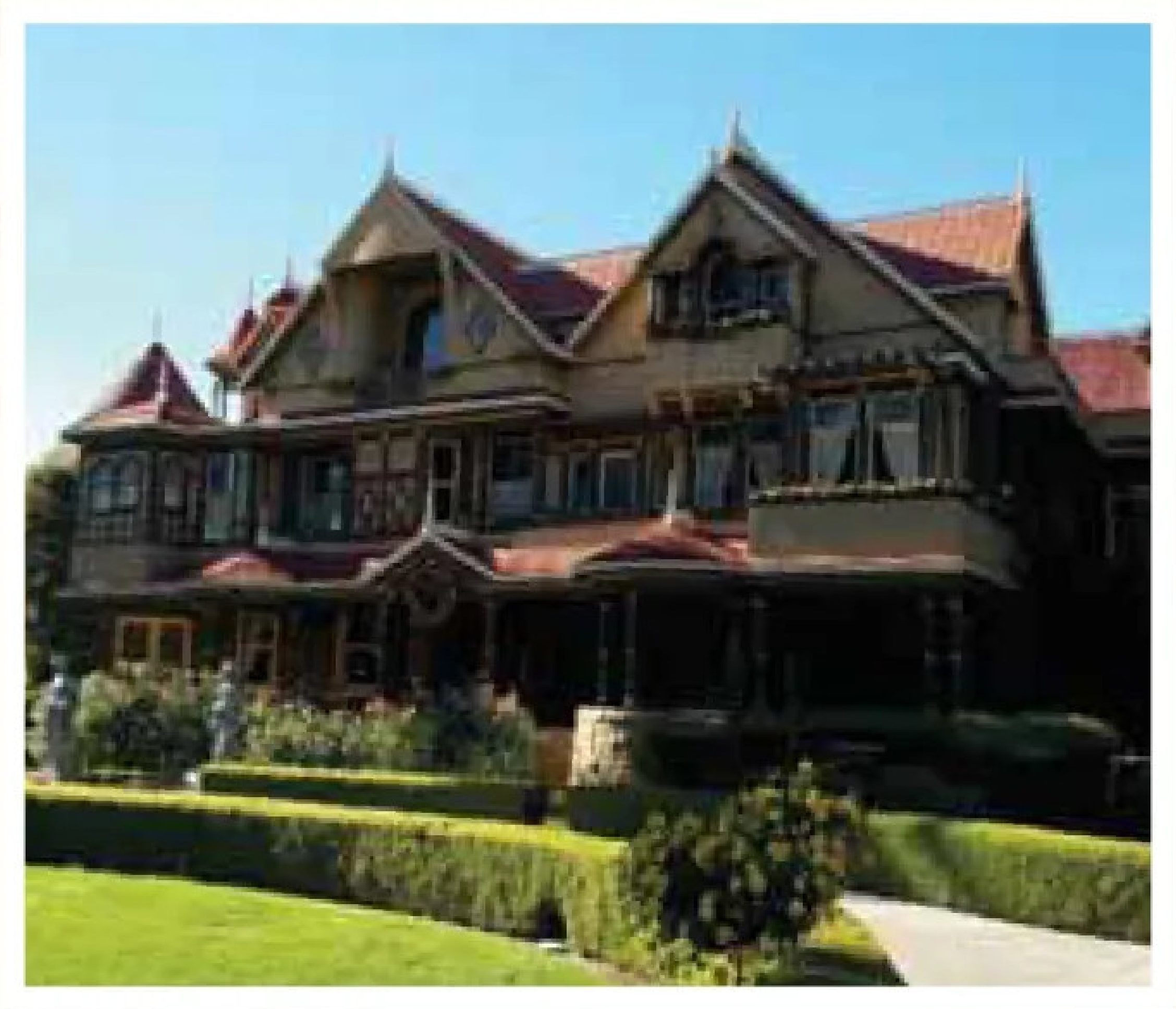
Legend has it that a gun heiress built this confusing mansion to distract unquiet spirits

When gun magnate William Wirt Winchester, sole owner of the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, died of tuberculosis in March 1881, he left his grieving widow, Sarah, with a half share in the family business as well as an enormous fortune of $20 million. According to legend, Sarah visited a spiritualist, where her husband's ghost told her that they had been cursed by the blood money that they had made from selling their rifles. The medium told her that in order to break the curse she needed to build a house for them all, but that as soon as she stopped building, the spirits would catch up with her and she would die.

Although the Winchesters had been based in Connecticut, in 1884 Sarah crossed the country to San Jose in California, where she had bought an eight-roomed farmhouse and 140 acres of land. Over the next 38 years, Sarah worked tirelessly on her complex building project, employing dozens of local craftsmen who were given daily instructions to add new features to the labyrinthine building.

Alongside secret rooms, trap doors, staircases and doors that led nowhere, and other peculiar and pointless features, Sarah insisted that her house feature her favourite spiderweb motif as well as the number 13 to ward off the evil spirits. By the time she died in September 1922, her mysterious house was seven storeys high and incorporated 47 staircases and fireplaces, 2,000 doors, 10,000 windows and six kitchens. It's not known precisely how many rooms there are, but the closest estimate is 160.

Within just a few months of her death, the house was opened to the public and although there have been no recorded sightings of ghosts, many have reported feeling extremely unsettled as they wander deeper into the labyrinth of rooms, especially on the third floor where Mrs Winchester's servants once lived, and where a few visitors have reported hearing disembodied footsteps and whispers.



VILLISCA AX MURDER HOUSE

But who was the mystery murderer that committed the massacre?

In June 1912 the little city of Villisca, Iowa, was rocked by a brutal axe murder incident. In the watches of the night between 9 and 10 June, six members of the Moore family – parents Josiah and Sarah, their children Herman Montgomery (11), Mary Katherine (10), Arthur Boyd (7), and Paul Vernon (5), and Mary Katherine's friends Ina Mae (8) and Lena Gertrude Stillinger (12), were all bludgeoned to death with an axe belonging to Josiah, which was found in the spare room where the visiting girls had been staying. No one has ever been convicted of the crime. An itinerant minister lately of the church the Moores attended was tried twice and even confessed to the crime, but was acquitted due to mental illness.

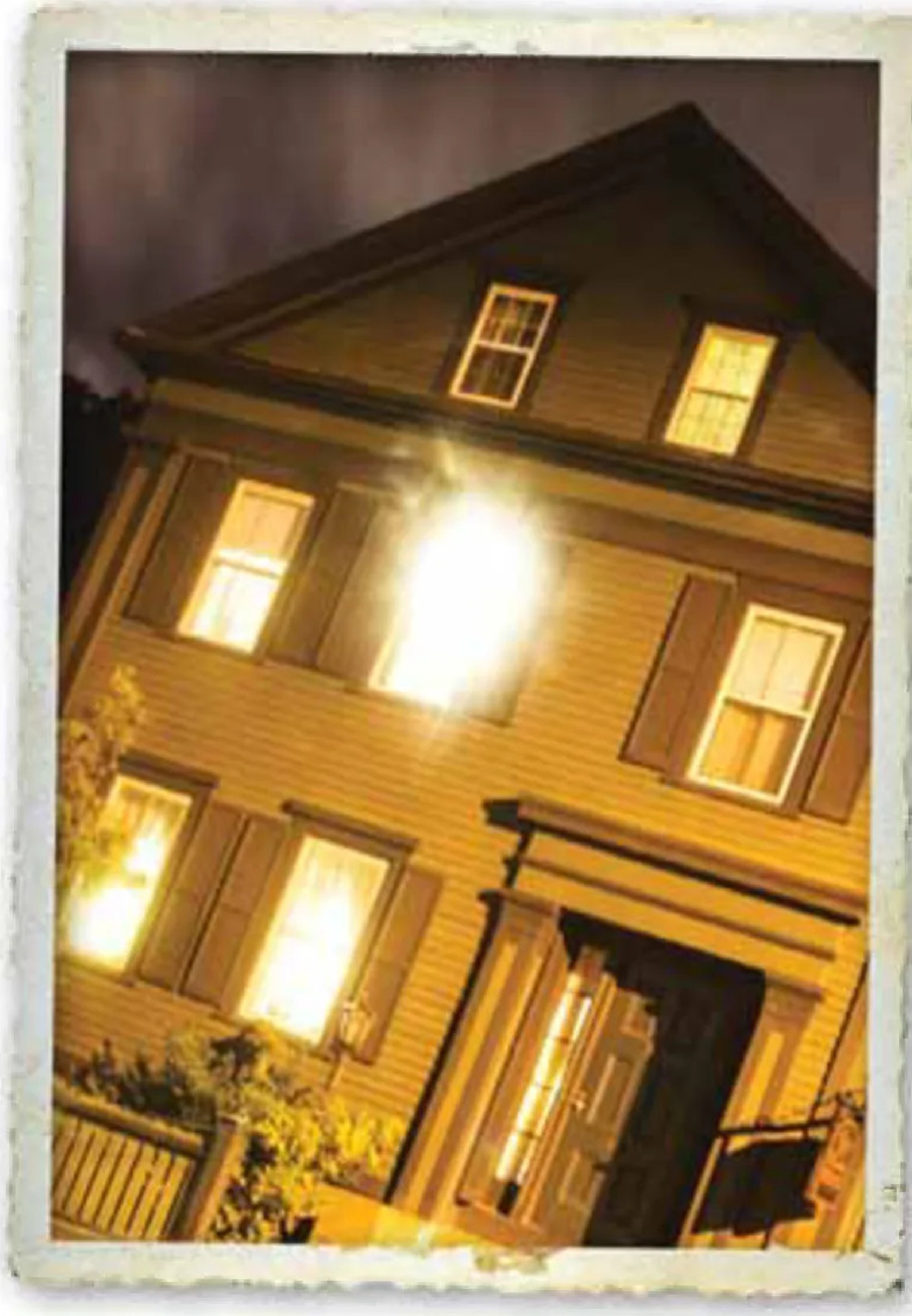
A number of paranormal investigations have been conducted, with photos, video and audio of its supposed haunting recorded by TV shows and YouTubers. Today the house at 508 E 2nd Street has been restored to its early 20th century condition, and functions as a museum. Day tours and group overnight stays are available.

LIZZIE BORDEN HOUSE

A murder mystery still haunts this Massachusetts house – if Lizzie didn't kill her relatives, then just who did?

At the end of the 19th century, all was not well in the Borden household in Fall River, Massachusetts. Wealthy but frugal widower Andrew Borden had remarried, his daughters Lizzie and Emma avoided their stepmother Abby, whom they believed had married their father for his money, and their late mother's brother John Morse was visiting to discuss some property issues on the fateful day of 4 August 1892. That was the day Andrew and Abby Borden were murdered with a hatchet.

Lizzie was tried and acquitted of their murders and officially the mystery of their deaths has never been solved. The house at 230 2nd Street is now a bed and breakfast with its supposedly haunted rooms themed around the unsolved case – its most-requested room is the guest room where Abby Borden was killed. Accommodation and tours are available, including day tours and night-time ghost tours.



THE AMITYVILLE HOUSE

Did this notorious haunting, a media sensation, ever even happen?

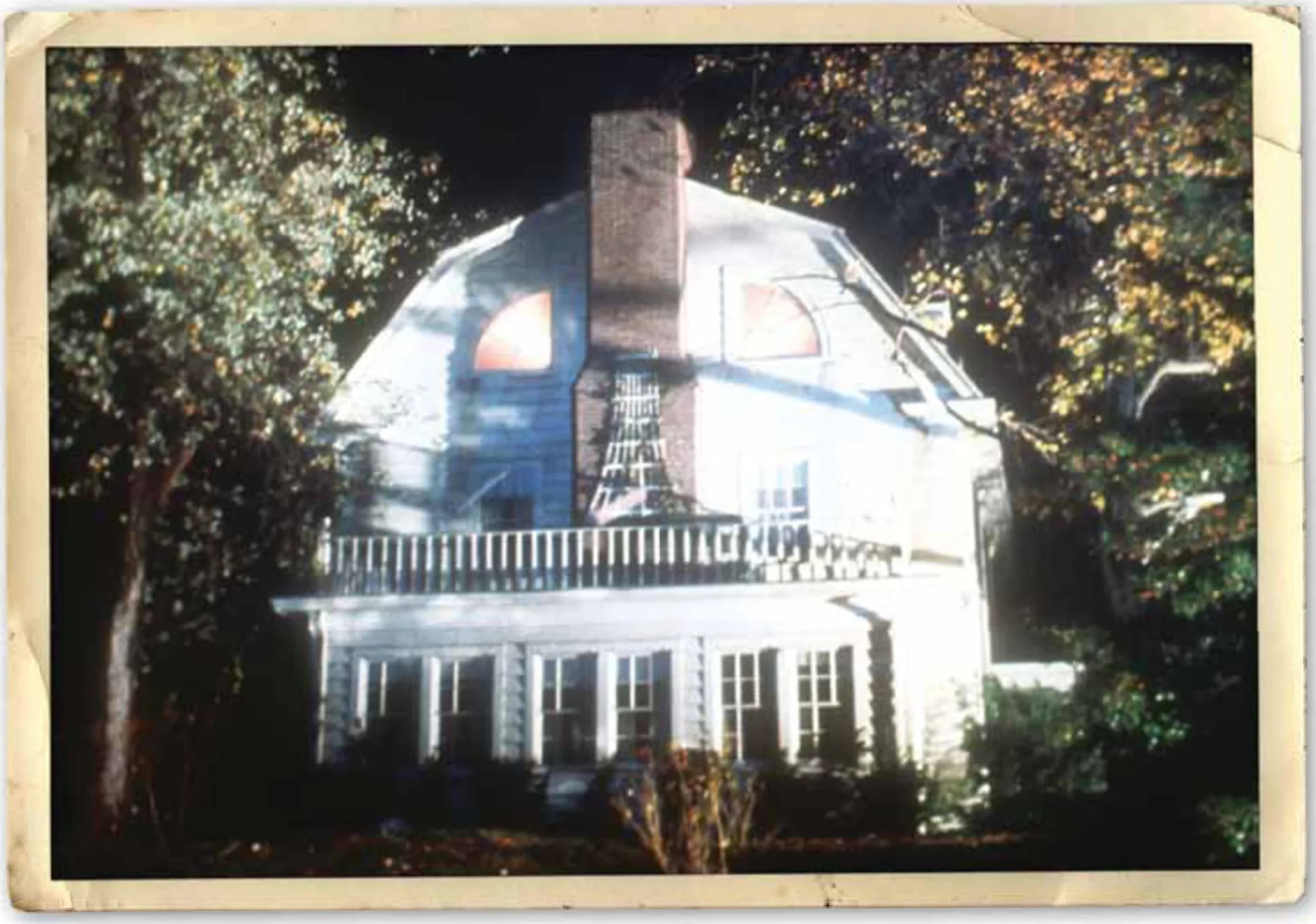
In 1977 a sensational book captured the world's attention. *The Amityville Horror* by Jay Anson would go on to inspire a series of books and films about what happened at 112 Ocean Avenue in New York's Long Island suburb of Amityville, both on the notorious night of 13 November 1974 and thereafter. The tale has been mired in legal wrangling and controversy ever since.

It's worth noting that the house, once known as High Hopes, has had its address changed, and been renovated completely to alter or remove the iconic windows and other features familiar from book covers and movies. Its current owners and neighbourhood residents alike are very unhappy with its notoriety and tend to refuse requests to discuss the location or its alleged events. This is not a house you can, or should, turn up to for a visit.

The reason that the house turned this quiet Long Island suburb into a paranormal media circus starts with the mass murder of his entire family – both parents, two brothers, and two sisters – by Ronald DeFeo Jr in 1974. DeFeo was a hard drug user and had a volatile relationship with his family. He was convicted of shooting all six of them in their beds. Up until his own death in prison in 2021 (aged 69), DeFeo gave interviews and filed lawsuits alleging that other members of the family, friends, and even the Mafia were responsible for the killings.

A year after the murders, the Lutz family bought and moved into the house, which still contained much of the DeFeo family's furniture, and it's here where the story really begins. Anson's book recounts that a friend of the Lutzes, concerned by the account of the murders, advised them to have the house blessed. It goes on to state that a local Catholic priest (whose name is changed in the book to protect his privacy) arrived to perform a blessing, but claimed he heard spectral voices telling him to "get out". Then the so-called Amityville horror really began. The Lutz family fled the property after 28 days, having been subjected to what the book claims were paranormal phenomena including ectoplasm, cloven hoofprints, poltergeist activity and much more.

Subsequent contractors, buyers and residents have reported no paranormal activity at the house.



'THE CONJURING' HOUSE

Who was Bathsheba Sherman, and when did she really die?

Known to locals and to the Perron family that lived there as the Old Arnold Estate, this Rhode Arnold farmhouse dates back to around 1736. It's the inspiration for *The Conjuring*, the first movie in the franchise of the same name, which takes as its inspiration the cases of hauntings and demonic possession investigated by self-described demonologists and mediums Ed and Lorraine Warren. After experiencing unsettling paranormal events during the 1970s, the Perron family called the Warrens in to investigate. The Warrens claimed they discovered a horde of unquiet spirits, the worst of which was the ghost of former resident Bathsheba Sherman, whose gravestone dated 1812-1885 (not the movie's 1849) can be found in a graveyard in nearby Harrisville. Legend now paints Bathsheba as an evil witch who murdered babies with pins. Whatever the historical veracity of the allegations, The Conjuring house now leans into its horror story with tours and ghost hunter-led investigations, including overnight events. It has a strict bookings-only policy.

THE BILLOP HOUSE

A secret British sympathiser with murderous inclinations lived here

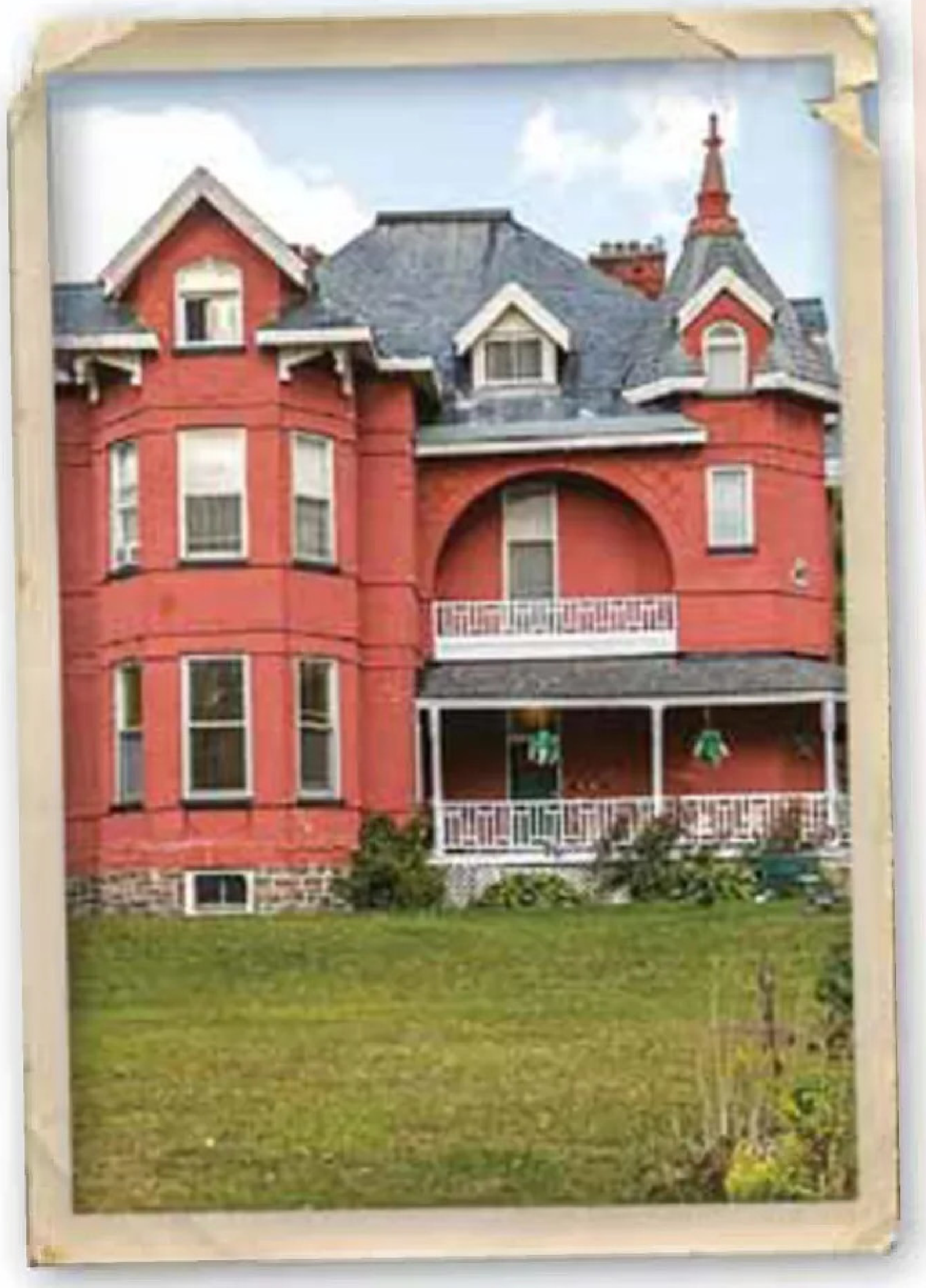
Known variously as the Conference House and the Bentley Manor, this Staten Island residence was home to several generations of the Billopp family. In the late 18th century, one of them, Christopher Billopp, was secretly a colonel in the British loyalist forces during the American Revolution. He allowed his home to be used to tend to injured redcoats (British soldiers). Those that died were buried swiftly in unmarked graves. One evening, thinking that a servant girl was an American spy, Billop threw the girl down the stairs; her body met the same fate as the deceased redcoats. Today, it's thought that both she and innumerable British soldiers haunt the house. Now a museum, visits and guided tours are available during the museum's open season at limited times during weekends – although it should be noted that it focuses on its American Revolution history, not its paranormal associations.

MYRTLES PLANTATION

Known as the most haunted house in America, it's home to several supernatural mysteries and phenomena

Once called the most haunted house in America, Myrtles Plantation is a paranormal triple threat. Allegedly built on a Native American burial ground, the site of at least one verified murder as well as a sinister poisoning, and a notorious hub of African American plantation slavery to boot, it also boasts a spectral bloodstain that can apparently never be cleaned, a possessed mirror, and a voodoo-practising ghost. Leaning into its horrific haunted history, it offers accommodation, day and evening tours (both public and private), a coffee shop, and a restaurant specialising in Southern food.

Once called the most haunted house in america, myrtles plantation is a paranormal triple threat



THE CARL BECK HOUSE

Would you stay in an AirBnB with 18 unquiet spirits, including the vengeful disinherited daughter of the local mayor?

This elegant Victorian Queen Anne Revival house was one of the finest in its town when it was built by lumber magnate and town mayor Carl Beck. One of the town's first families, the Becks were nine strong, and when Carl's wife died it was left to Mary, his eldest daughter, to raise her siblings. But despite Carl's much-vaunted wealth (he was a philanthropist who helped to establish churches and schools, and was famous for owning the town's first car, a 1903 Oldsmobile which is now in a local museum) at his death he left Mary just a single dollar. Understandably, she was angry, which is perhaps what gave rise to the legend that she now haunts the house. But she's apparently not the only one – paranormal investigators claim that up to 18 spirits are resident and that they creak floorboards, slam doors, whisper insults and pull visitors' hair. Mary and some of her ghostly friends are even said to promenade nearby Church Street dressed in their Victorian best. Despite its unfriendly spectral residents, however, the Carl Beck House is a magnet for visitors, and the apartment on the top floor is available for rent on AirBnB – search for 'The Haunted House Apt 302'.

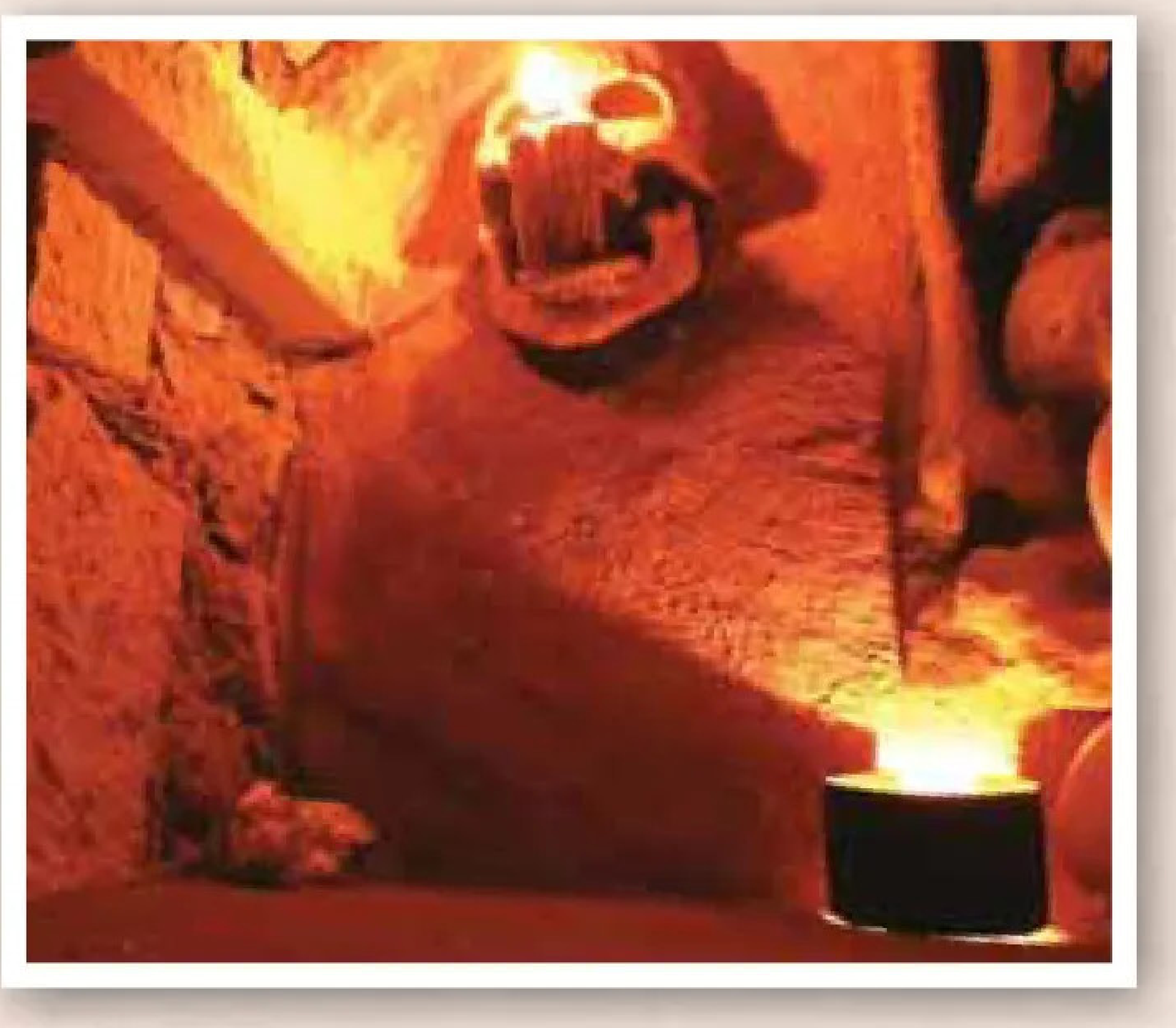
MONTE CRISTO HOMESTEAD

This Australian homestead saw more than its fair share of mysterious deaths

The story of Christopher Crawley and his family is a rags-to-riches one. Frontier farmers in Junee, New South Wales, in the mid-1800s, the Crawleys lived in a simple slab cottage, until Christopher got rich off the coming of the railway. The family moved into their luxurious new homestead in 1885, and their previous home became the servants' quarters. Living in those servants' quarters were two maids, both of whom Christopher Crawley got pregnant. One killed herself, the other bore her child, who later was left brain-damaged after being hit by a coach, and was kept chained, first in the homestead's coach house, and then to his mother's bed. The maids, along with Christopher Crawley, who died of sepsis, and his wife, who shut herself in her attic chapel for decades after his death, are believed to haunt the property, along with a stable boy who died in a fire, a Crawley granddaughter who was dropped down the stairs, and a caretaker who was shot dead. Today the house bills itself as Australia's most haunted. Daytime tours (weekends only) and specialist overnight ghost tours are available.

HOUSE OF LAMENTS

The scene of some tragic ritual murders is now a museum of Mexican black magic



The Casa de los Lamentos, or House of Laments, is a pretty little 18th century Spanish Baroque mansion in Guanajuato city in Mexico. Here, in the 1890s, lived mining engineer Tadeo Fulgencío Mejía and his adored wife Maria Constanza de la Riviera. After an economic crisis at the mine he worked at led manual workers to blame Mejía for their late pay, a gang of disgruntled miners turned up at the house and stabbed Maria Constanza to death. The murder sent Mejía mad. He visited a local bruja, or witch, who told him of black magic rituals he could perform in order to contact his departed love. Mejía became a serial killer, sacrificing his victims in a bloody attempt to reconnect with his beloved and secreting their remains in the basement. When he realised police were onto him, he shot himself. Now the House of Laments is a museum to the grisly tale and filled with 19th century housewares, collections of uniquely Mexican magical artefacts, and photos of the tragic couple. You can visit on most days and tours are available.

ROSE HALL GREAT HOUSE

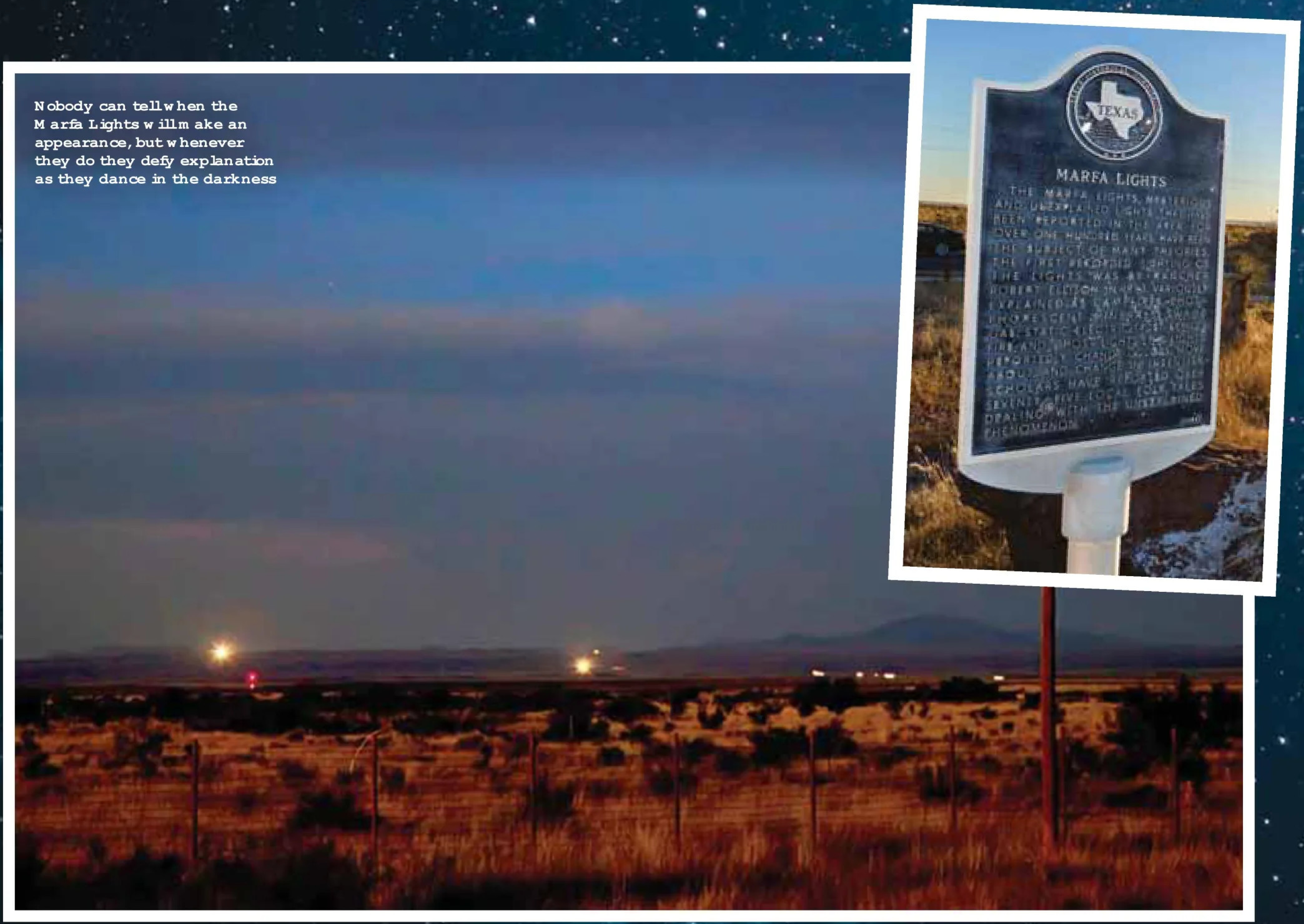
Has fiction influenced the truth of this lavish Jamaican resort?

Jamaica's most famous house is Rose Hall, an iconic Georgian style plantation mansion. Set in idyllic grounds, it is home to an 18-hole golf course named after the estate's ghostly White Witch. The story goes that Annie (or Annee) Palmer, born to English and Irish parents, was orphaned, and raised by a Black nanny who taught her dark magic and voodoo. She then used this to murder her unfortunate husband John Palmer when she moved into his home, Rose Hall. Not content with that, she plied her deadly sorcery on two subsequent husbands as well as a series of male slaves that she preyed upon, until she was killed herself by a powerful magician named Takoo. Legend says that she now haunts Rose Hall, riding her horse around the grounds or appearing on balconies. Unfortunately for ghost hunters, it seems that legend has had a little help from fiction in the shape of the 1929 novel *The White Witch of Rosehall* by Herbert G de Lisser. The gorgeous Rose Hall Great House, however, is happy to offer day and night tours about the legend along with its other amenities.

THE MYSTERIOUS MARFA LIGHTS

For more than 100 years, mysterious and colourful orbs of light have illuminated the night sky over the town of Marfa, Texas

WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**



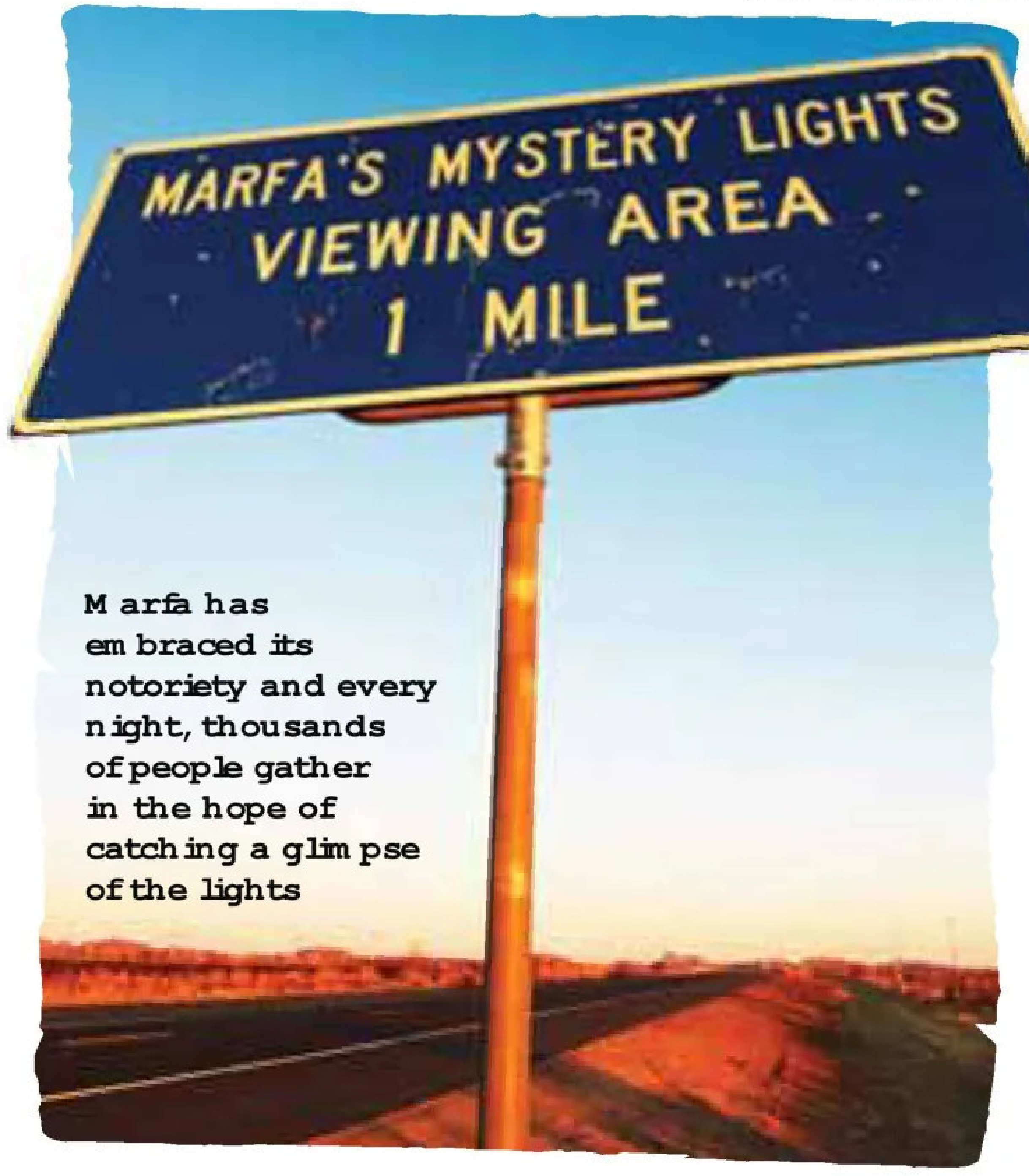
Nobody can tell when the Marfa Lights will make an appearance, but whenever they do they defy explanation as they dance in the darkness

In 1883, cowhand Robert Ellison was herding cattle across Mitchell Flat, just east of the Texan town of Marfa, when he saw lights flickering in the darkness. He dismissed the sight as the lights from Apache campfires burning beneath the Chinati Mountains, little realising that he had made the first recorded sighting of the infamous Marfa Lights.

Ever since that night, the lights have appeared sporadically in the desert night and for the townspeople of Marfa they are just part of everyday life in the desert. Approximately the size of a football, the multicoloured orbs dance and hover, split and combine as they put on a blazing show for the thousands of spectators who flock to the area every year, hoping for a glimpse of this breathtaking phenomena. The chances are slim – there's no guessing when they'll appear and they rarely make more than a couple of dozen showings in one year – but that only makes them even more fascinating. Their colours vary between red, blue, yellow and white, but they never stay still for long.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, both the scientific and esoteric communities have attempted to find an explanation for the evening lightshow. From the scientific side, suggestions have ranged from the mundane – headlights passing on a nearby highway – to an optical illusion caused by light refraction, known as a Fata Morgana. Still others have laid the blame at the door of swamp gas, which might ignite under very specific conditions and has provided an explanation for historical will-o'-the-wisp sightings. Yet spectators claim that the orbs don't move like flames, but with an almost deliberate intent.

UFO enthusiasts and paranormal fans, meanwhile, have advanced theories including visitors from another planet, ghostly Spanish adventurers, shapeshifters or desert spirits. Whatever the explanation, the sleepy town of Marfa has embraced its notoriety and welcomes visitors who hope to see the colourful orbs, whatever they may be. Marfa hosts its own Marfa Lights Festival and has even erected a viewing platform, where crowds gather nightly and gaze out into the darkness. Some of those crowds seek a scientific explanation, others hope for the chance to meet visitors from another planet or spiritual realm, but as they look out into the sky, all of them share one aim: to experience the legendary Marfa Lights in person.



Marfa has embraced its notoriety and every night, thousands of people gather in the hope of catching a glimpse of the lights

In the apparently empty desert outside Marfa, Texas, a mysterious but compelling lightshow has been drawing skeptics and believers for decades

Images source: Alamy, Getty

ALL AT SEA

The fickle ocean reveals new horizons
but conceals mysterious objects, strange
disappearances, and tragic fates

WRITTEN BY **BEN GAZUR**

The sea is one of mankind's oldest obsessions. The ancient Greeks knew the power of "the wine-dark sea" to both offer new opportunities for exploration but also its terrible destructive might. Once you stray from the safe and solid land, you place yourself entirely at the mercy of the ever-shifting tides. For thousands of years there have been tales of strange things appearing on the waves, or lurking underneath them.

All of the planet has been mapped, we like to think. And that is true so long as you are only referring to the surface. Only 5 per cent of the ocean floor has been mapped with the most modern methods, however. Scientists estimate that there may be up to a million species of animals that call the depths home that we have yet to identify. Anyone who claims to know the sea well is fooling themselves.

Despite the hazards of tempestuous storms and rogue waves taller than buildings, people have always braved the risks of sea travel. Those who returned sometimes brought back extraordinary tales. Here are just a few of the mysteries that have been dredged from the abyss of the ocean.

The ocean is
home to many
mysteries that
are poorly
understood and
have always
bedevilled those
who set sail on
the waves

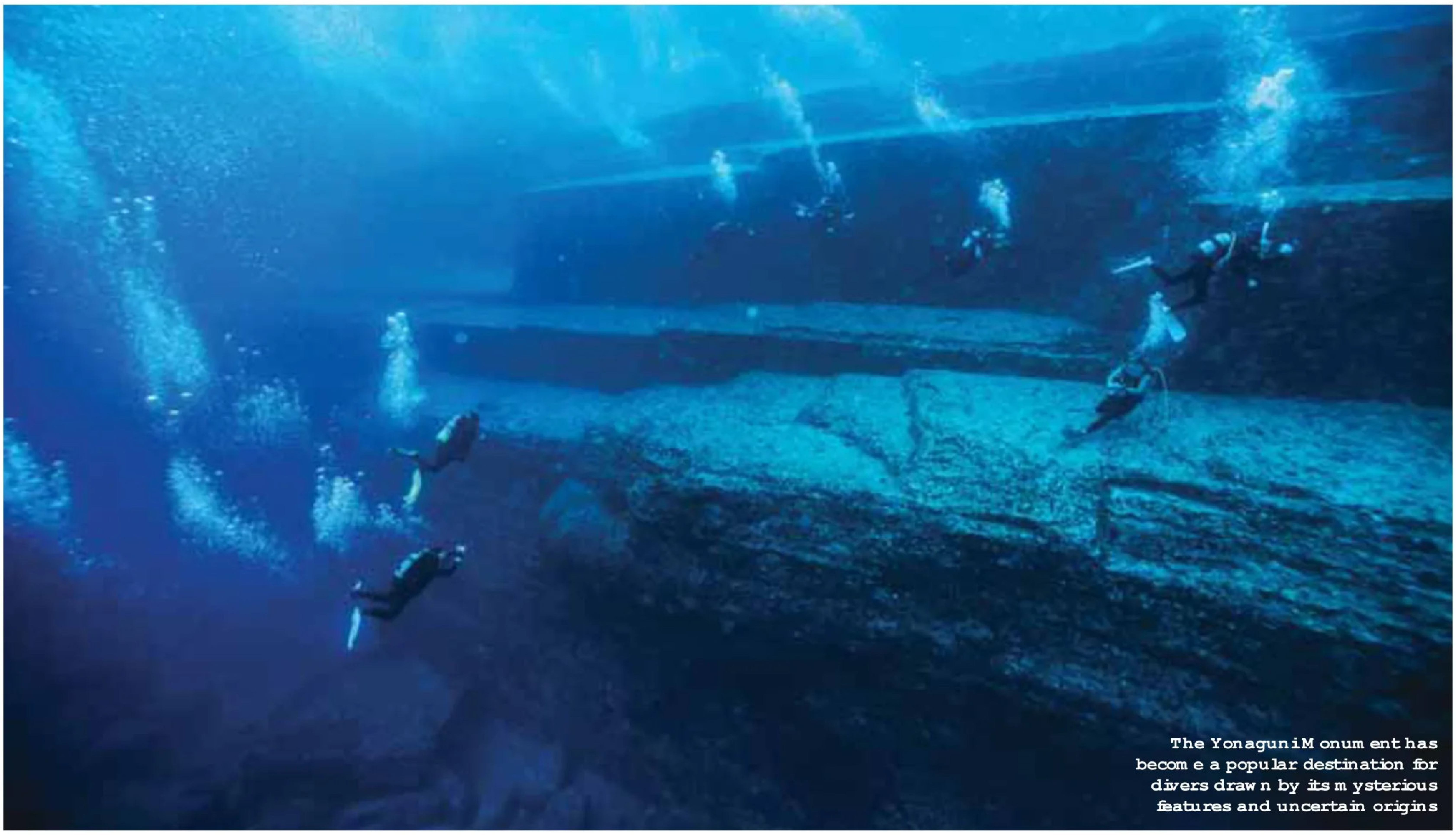
CUBAN UNDERWATER FORMATION

600 metres under the sea off Cuba, a series of sharp and linear rock formations were discovered in sonar images that jutted out of the otherwise featureless sea bed. Later exploration claimed to have found blocks of carved granite piled on top of each other. Until a team can travel to site and examine what is actually there, however, it is impossible to say whether a major ancient city has been found or a curious natural anomaly.

THE BALTIC SEA ANOMALY

Sonar scans of the Baltic sea floor reveal a roughly circular anomaly in 2011 which sparked massive interest, possibly due to its resemblance to the Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars*. Some newspapers claimed this was proof of a sunken UFO. At 60 metres across, whatever it was would be a large discovery. When scientists visited the anomaly and took samples, it was found to be composed of granite and sandstone and a natural, if odd, formation.

The Baltic Sea's chilly depths have previously been used to dispose of weapons and munitions in the wake of World War II



The Yonaguni Monument has become a popular destination for divers drawn by its mysterious features and uncertain origins

YONAGUNI MONUMENT

The underwater ruins of a lost civilisation or a stunning natural formation?

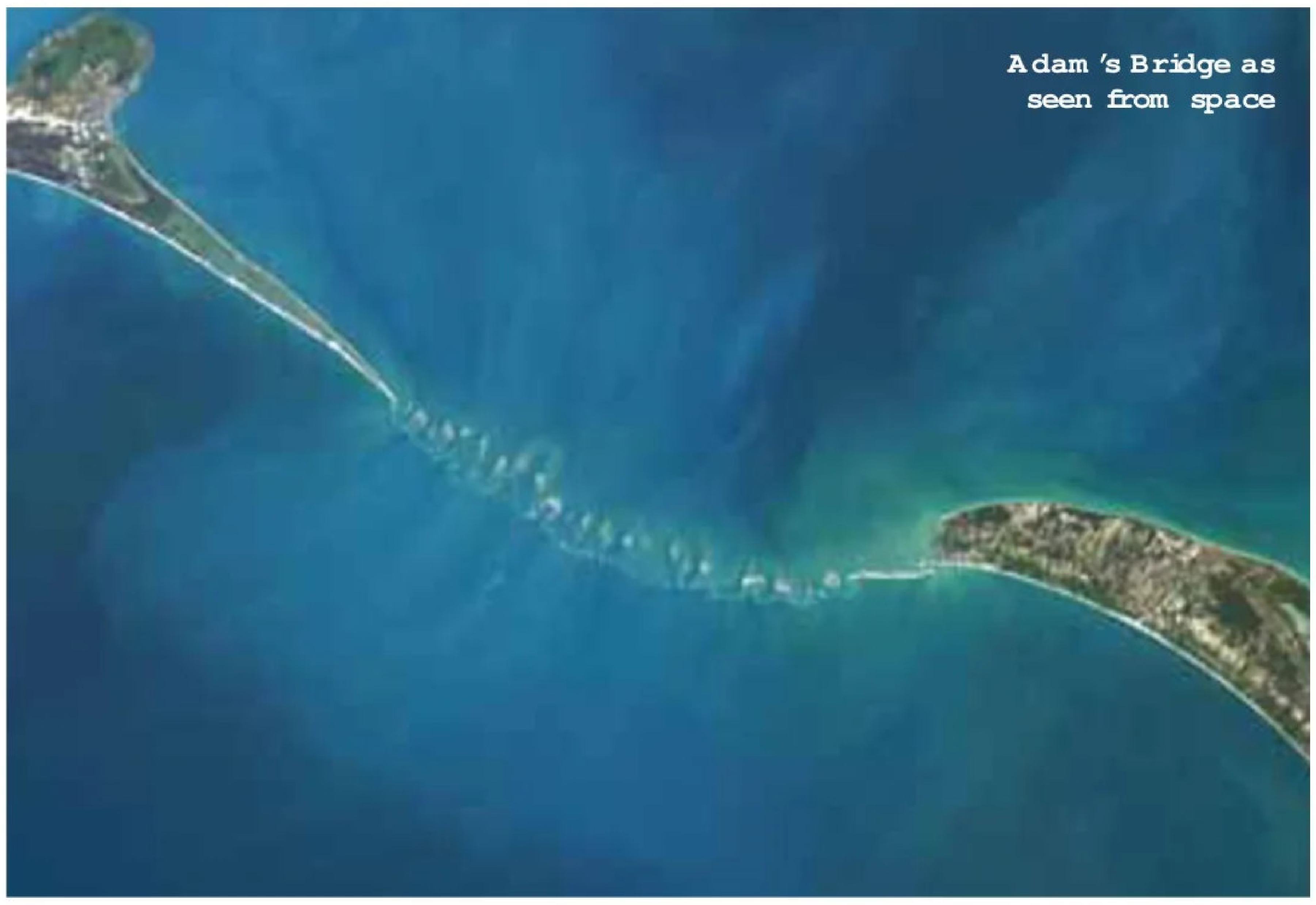
In 1986, a diver off the Japanese island of Yonaguni was startled to discover a formation over 50 metres long, constructed out of perfectly straight lines, 25 metres below the surface of the sea. He was looking for a good place to observe hammerhead sharks but had discovered one of the great mysteries of the ocean.

The Yonaguni Monument has the appearance of a series of massive steps that rise in row after row. Some researchers, dismissed as pseudo-archaeologists by many scholars, believe that the monument was crafted by humans between 10,000 and 2,000 years ago when sea levels were lower and the rocks were exposed on the surface. They claim to identify remains of pyramids, roads, and castles near to it.

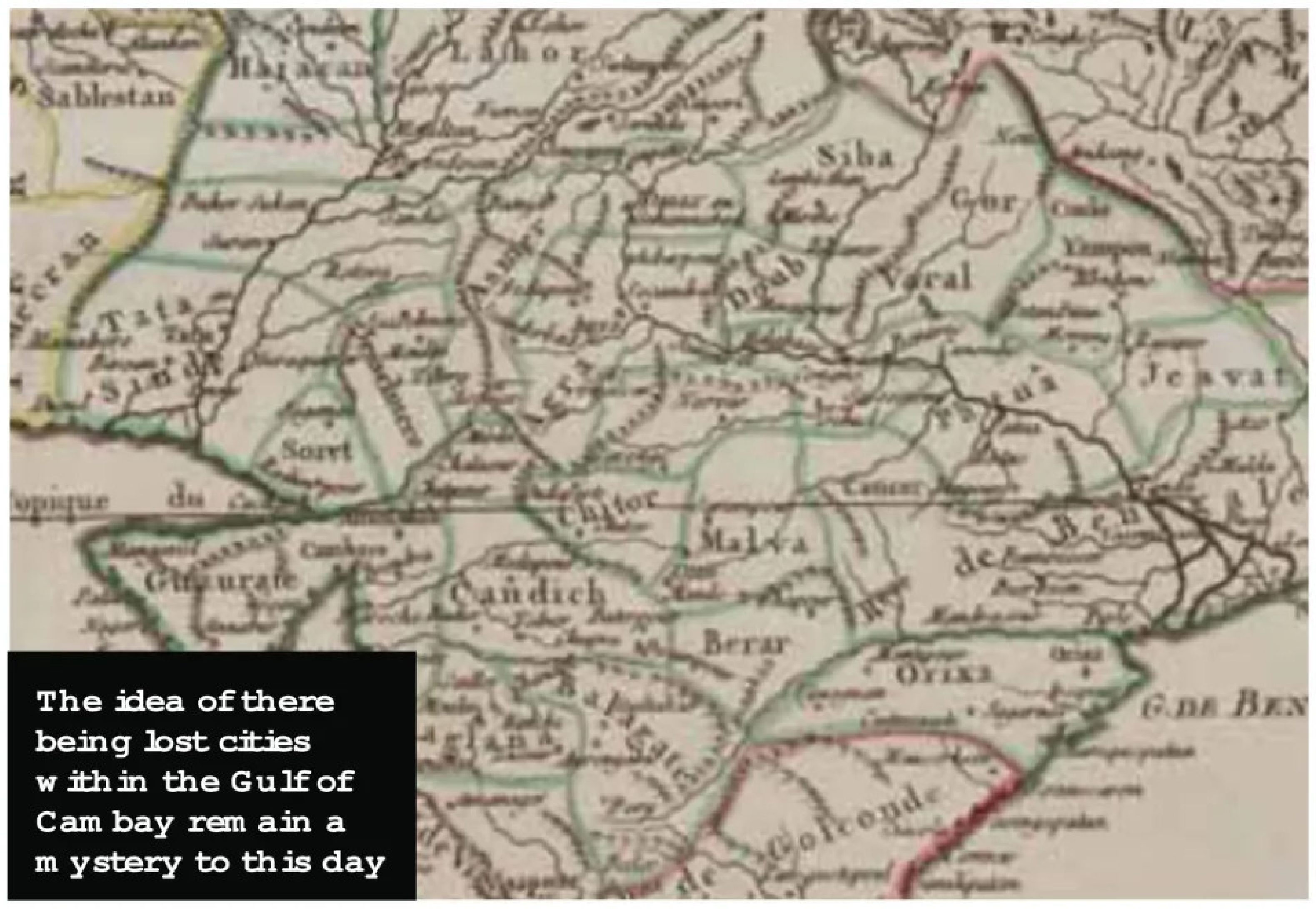
It may be that the 'monument' is just the product of natural forces, however. Straight lines are found in many rock formations, like the Giant's Causeway in Ireland. With the churning waves, the Yonaguni site would have needed no human intervention to form.

ADAM'S BRIDGE

Between Sri Lanka and India there is a chain of islands and reefs that runs for 48 kilometres where the sea is very shallow. Known as Adam's Bridge, Rama's Bridge, and the Bridge of the Sea, it has long been thought to be the remains of a land bridge that connects the two. Around 100,000 years ago, lower sea levels would have allowed a person to walk across, though some researchers think Adam's Bridge is a more recent formation of sand and coral.



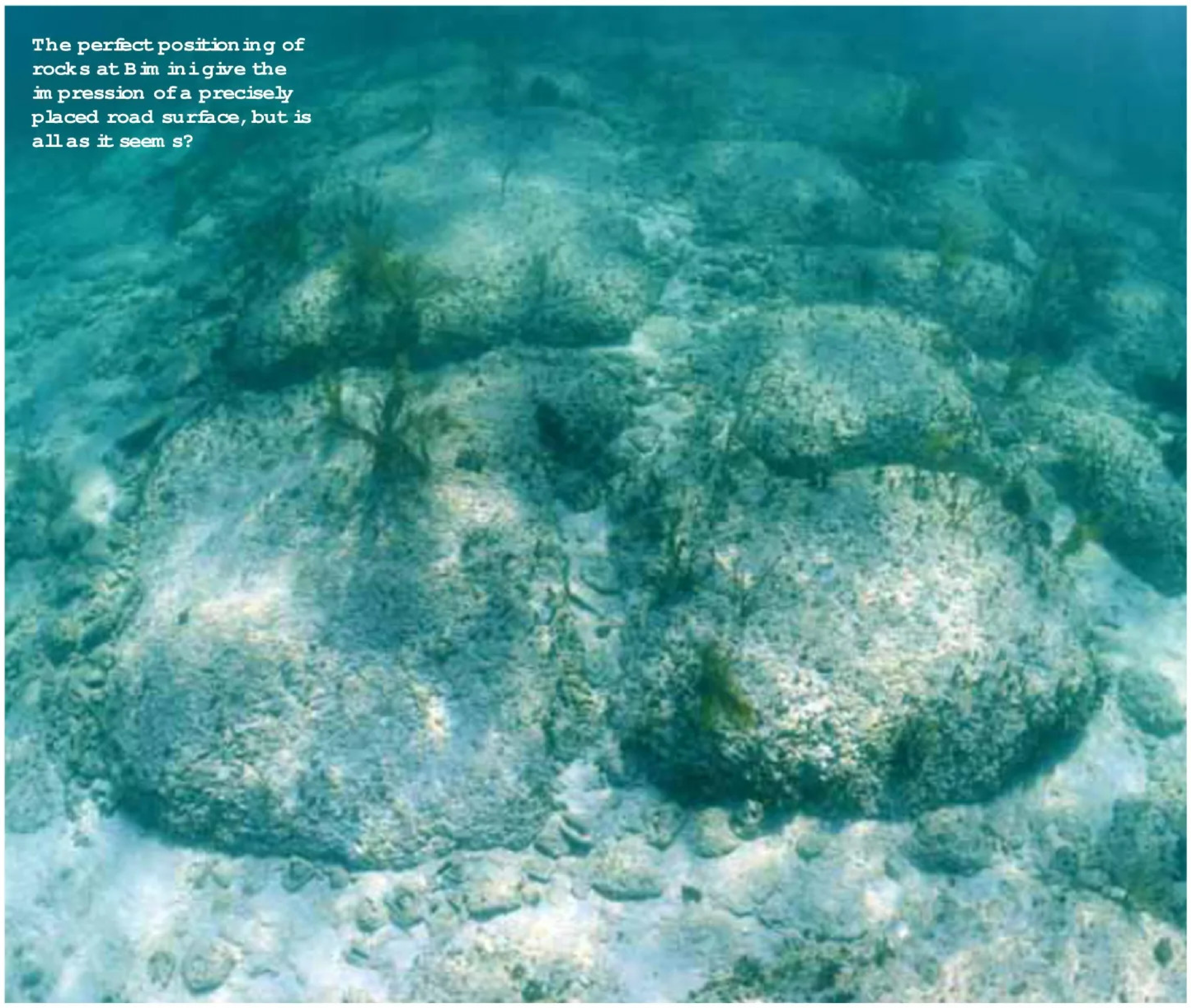
Adam's Bridge as seen from space



The idea of there being lost cities within the Gulf of Cambay remain a mystery to this day

THE GULF OF CAMBAY

On the coast of India, the possible remains of ancient cities have been found in the Gulf of Cambay, with sonar scans revealing structures and features that appear man-made. Dredging of the area has pulled up artefacts that may be small pieces of pottery and a piece of wood dated to 7500 BCE. Many scholars dispute the findings and would prefer an underwater dig that might find objects in situ, which would confirm human presence in the past.



The perfect positioning of rocks at Bimini give the impression of a precisely placed road surface, but is all as it seems?

BIMINI ROAD

Is a road leading under the waves pointing to the lost city of Atlantis?

When Plato described a city that sunk under the ocean in the 4th century BCE, he never imagined that over 2000 years later people would still be searching for it. After a diver in 1968 discovered a series of massive stone blocks that lay like the surface of a road off North Bimini in the Bahamas, it was quickly leapt on as the remains of Atlantis. An American mystic had predicted that the road to Atlantis would be found in this approximate area, and others were not slow to point to it as positive proof of the lost city.

Alas, science tells a different tale. Bimini Road is formed of beachrock – a conglomeration of shells and mud and detritus that can build up rapidly on beaches. As the tide undercuts it large sections break off, often with straight lines. The rock at Bimini has been dated to just 2000 years old. As this is after Plato's lifetime there is no chance it once led to Atlantis.

THE ELTANIN ANTENNA

Jutting from the Antarctic seafloor, the Eltanin Antenna has been claimed as proof of alien visitation

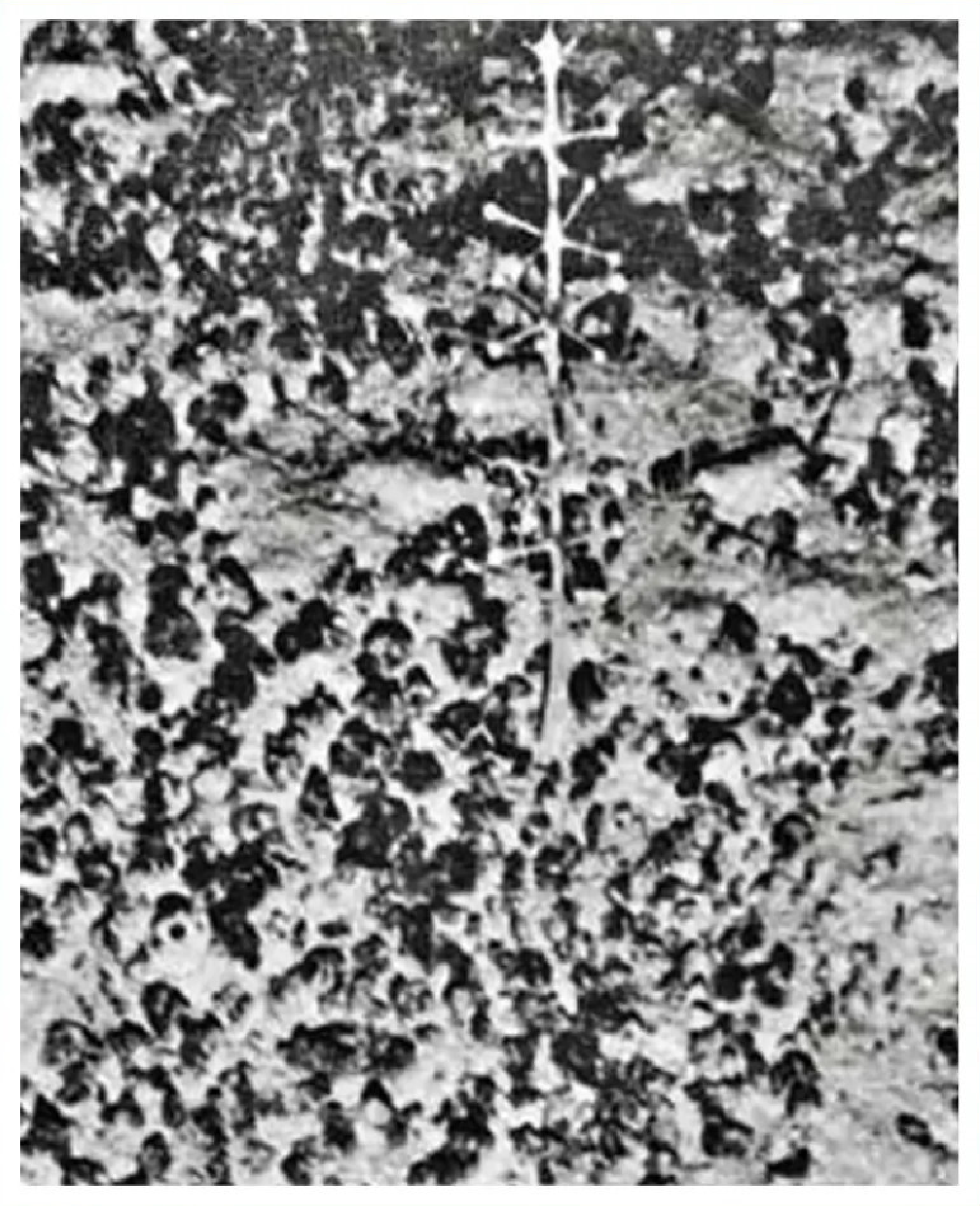
In 1964, a US naval vessel called the Eltanin was exploring the seabed around Cape Horn in South America, when it took a photograph of what was soon dubbed the Eltanin Antenna. Poking up from the ocean floor at a depth of nearly 4 kilometres, the object stands straight up with a series of protrusions. These are perpendicular to the seabed and stick out in groups of four at various angles around the central pole. At the top of the antenna is a crown-like finial.

The resemblance of this unexpected find soon attracted comparisons to familiar terrestrial antennae that are used to receive and send signals. That it was found so deep under the sea made it impossible for humans to have erected it at the time, unless it was a piece of a ship that had fallen off and landed perfectly on the seafloor. The Eltanin anomaly was soon taken by those who study UFOs to be evidence that aliens were watching humanity.

The mystery seemed to be solved when scientists noted the similarity between the Eltanin Antenna and a species of sponge that lives in the deep ocean. Chondrocladia concrescens, also known as the Ping Pong Tree Sponge, is shaped almost exactly like the Eltanin Antenna and grows from the ocean bottom, feeding on whatever drifts nearby. It can reach up to a metre in height.

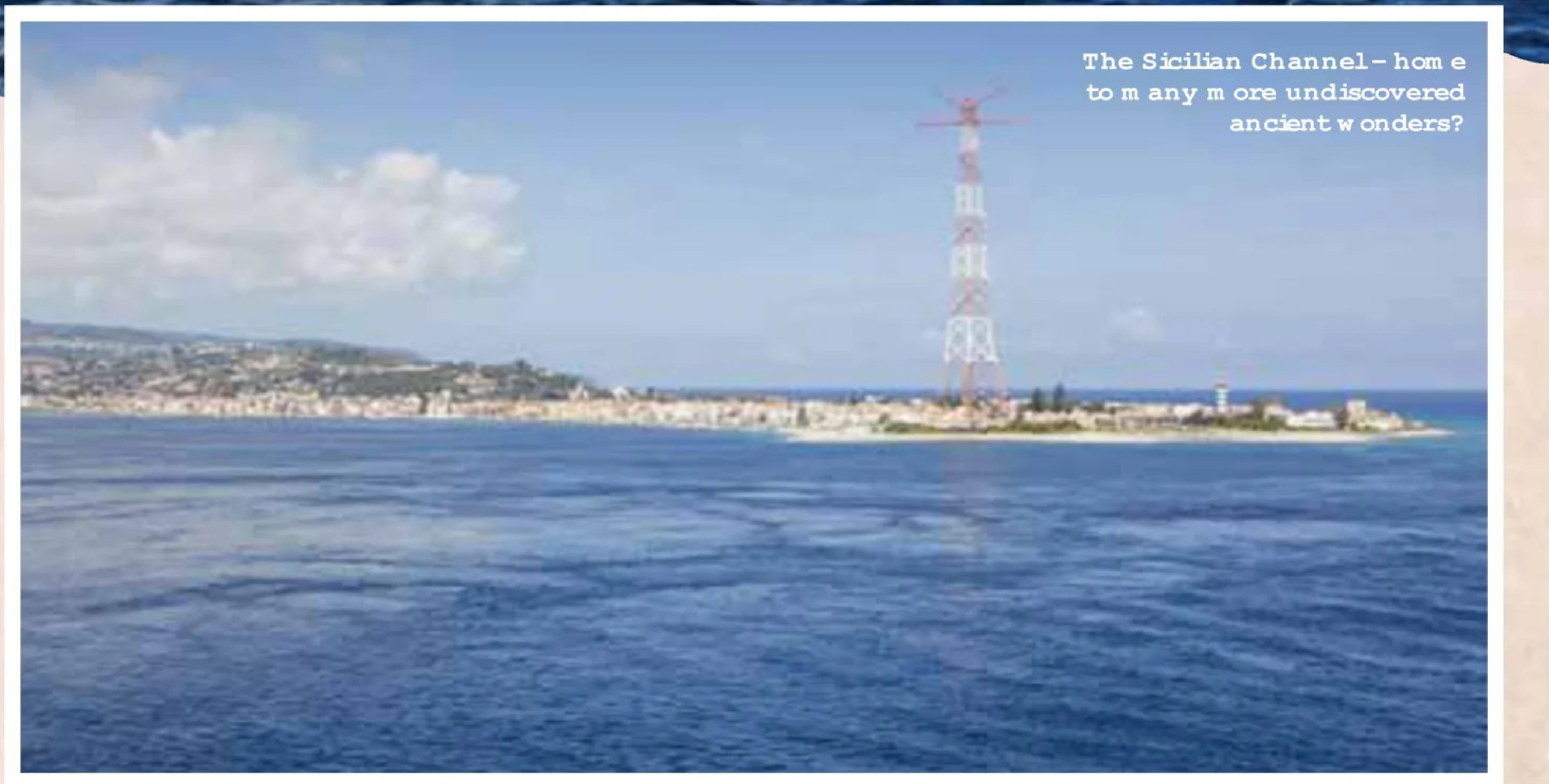
Not everyone was satisfied with this explanation, however. The Ping Pong Tree Sponge generally grows alongside others of its species, while the Eltanin anomaly appears to be in splendid isolation. Others point to differences between the image the Eltanin snapped and modern pictures of the sponge. However, with the low resolution Eltanin photograph, it is impossible to make a precise identification. Debate will no doubt continue to rage.

The grainy image taken by the Eltanin gives no sense of scale for the 'antenna' and allows for multiple interpretations



THE SICILIAN CHANNEL MONOLITH

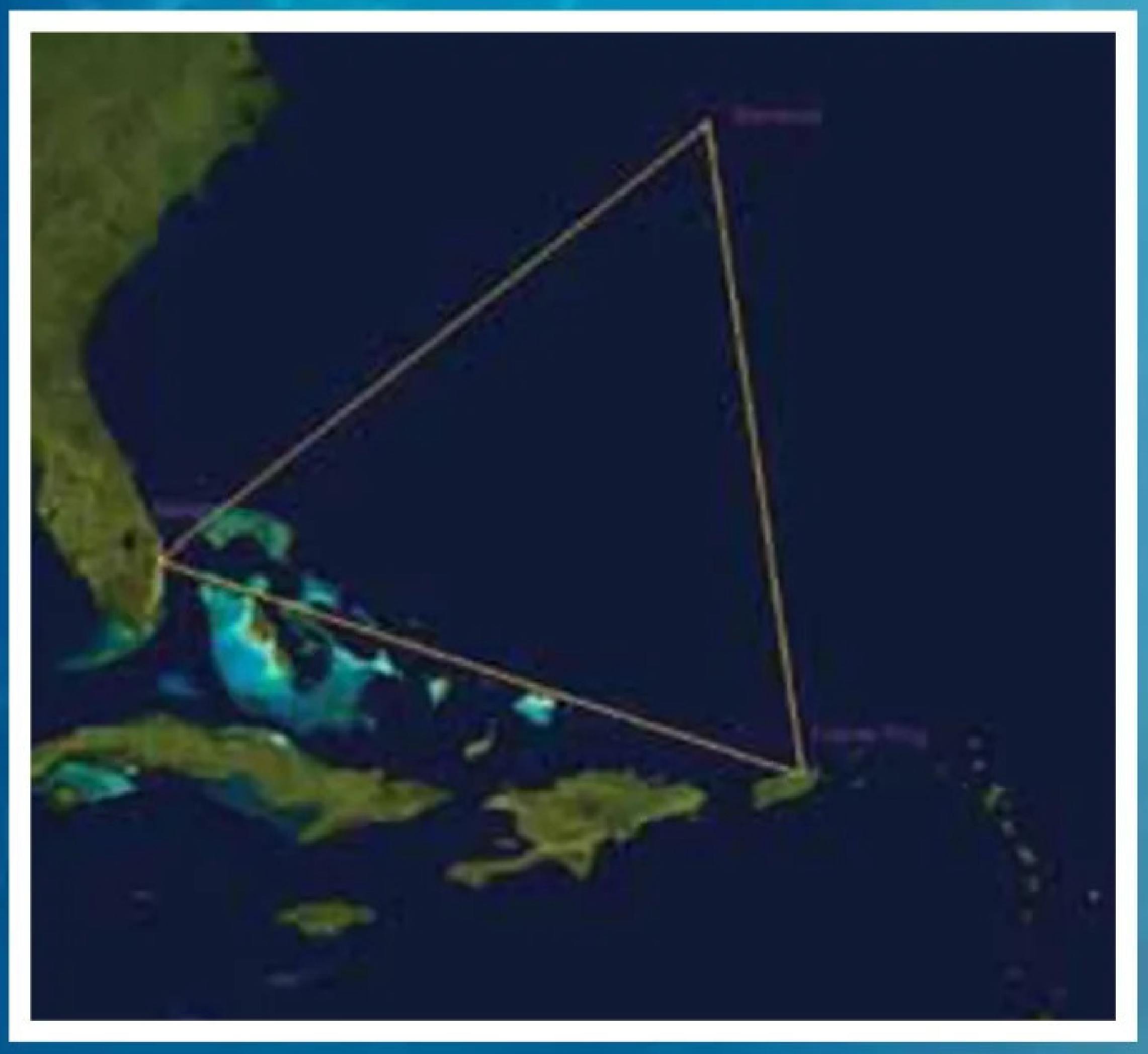
On the Pantelleria Vecchia undersea bank, between Sicily and Tunisia, a block of limestone over 12 metres long and weighing 15 tons has been found on the seabed. This area was last above the waves 10,000 years ago. The megalith has three holes carved in it and is made from stone much younger than the rock it rests on, suggesting it was imported to the area by those who originally set the monolith up.



The Sicilian Channel – home to many more undiscovered ancient wonders?

“We don’t know which way is west. Everything is wrong... strange. We can’t be sure of any direction. Even the ocean doesn’t look as it should”

The Bermuda Triangle is one of the greatest mysteries of the sea



THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

This patch of the sea is the scene of mysterious disappearances, strange lights, and diabolical rumours

The Bermuda Triangle is an area of the North Atlantic between Florida, Puerto Rico, and Bermuda. In 1963, the author Vincent Gaddis dubbed this region "The Deadly Bermuda Triangle" when he noted what he thought were a number of unusual disappearances. Ships, planes, and people had entered the area and never been heard from again.

Gaddis was prompted to write his report by two US jets that set off from Miami on a refuelling run and vanished after radioing back their location. After a lengthy search some debris was found from the planes in two locations, 160 miles apart, with no explanation of what might have occurred to them. Nor was this the first mysterious disappearance of planes.

In 1945, five planes departed from Florida on a routine patrol over the sea. According to Gaddis' account, the planes failed to return at the appointed time. When radio contact was made, the flight leader reported that the planes could not locate land. "We don't know which way is west. Everything is wrong... strange. We can't be sure of any direction. Even the ocean doesn't look as it should," the pilot said. Soon afterwards, the planes all vanished.

Researchers began to examine the history of the Bermuda Triangle and other strange occurrences were noticed. In 1881, a ship had discovered a boat drifting derelict with no one on board. A small crew was put on board but they too later disappeared from the boat. The USS Cyclops was carrying a load of ore and over 300 people in 1918 when it vanished, seemingly without time for the captain to radio for help.

What was causing all of these disappearances? Some suggested theories involved abductions by aliens to explain the events. Others pointed to a potential relationship with the lost city of Atlantis that they claimed existed within the Triangle. Natural explanations were also offered, such as magnetic anomalies sending ships and planes off course. One theory was that vast bubbles of methane released from the seabed could sink a ship without warning by altering its buoyancy.

While many unexplained events are still linked to the Bermuda Triangle, some researchers dismiss that there is anything special about the area at all. Travel in boats and planes, especially in the past, was always dangerous and storms are frequent in the region. Statistical analysis suggests the Bermuda Triangle is no more dangerous than other regions – which may be more scary.

When five planes disappeared without explanation in 1945 in the Bermuda Triangle, it was just the latest in a number of similar cases

THEODOSIA BURR

When the daughter of a Vice President disappeared at sea, rumours and theories spread across the United States

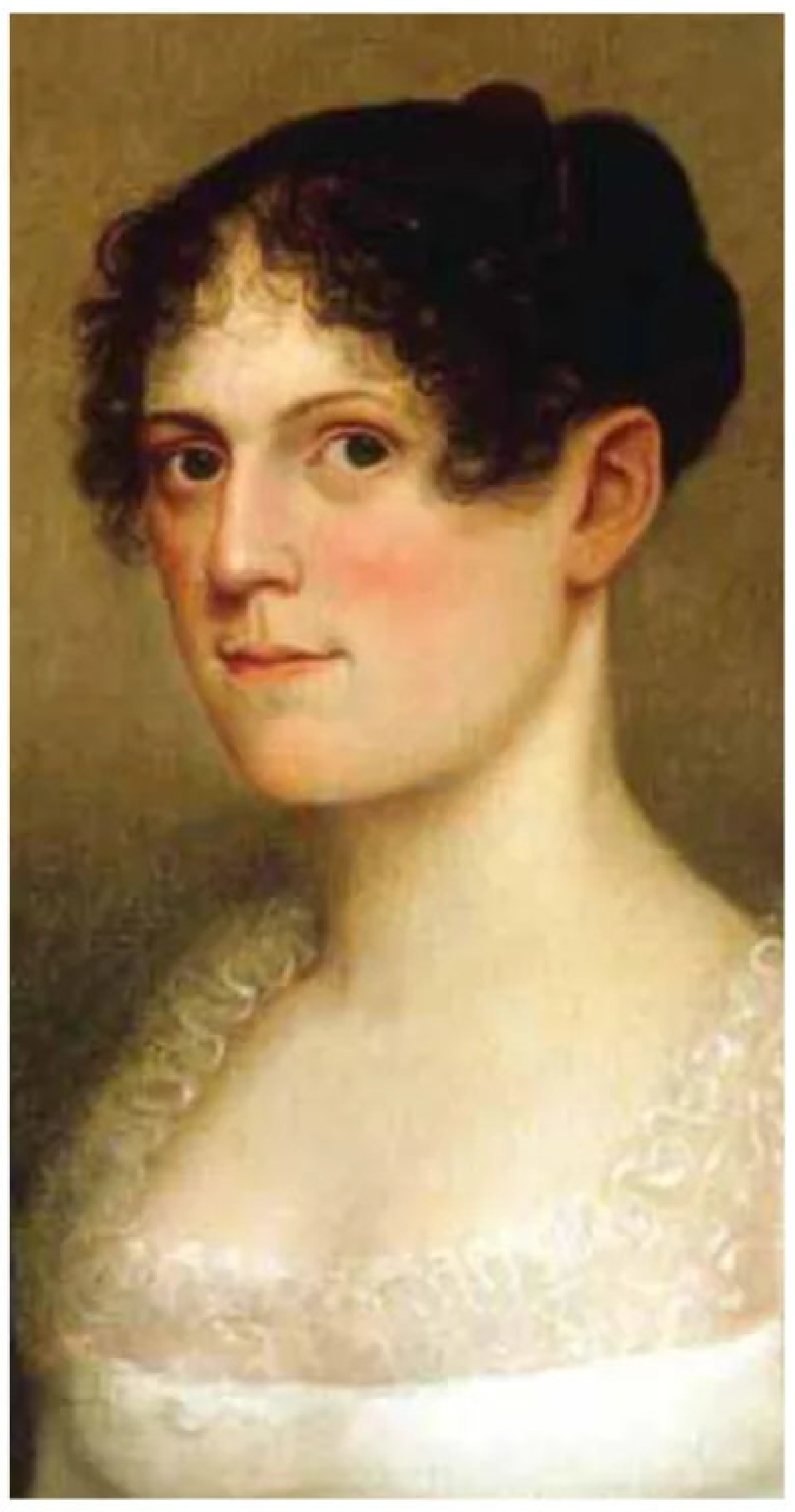
Theodosia Burr was the daughter of Aaron Burr, who served as the third Vice President of the United States. Aaron Burr is perhaps most famous today for slaying Alexander Hamilton in a duel during his time in office. Theodosia was a spirited and well-educated woman and she supported her father through many of the trials of his career, including a literal trial for treason.

When Theodosia set out from her home in South Carolina to visit her father in New York, she boarded one of the fastest ships of the time, the Patriot. The ship departed on 31 December 1812 – and no more was ever heard of her, or her passengers. When the ship failed to arrive, Aaron Burr accepted with grief that his daughter had drowned in a shipwreck. Not everyone agreed.

One tale said that Theodosia had been discovered alive on the shore by a chief of the Karankawa people, and had lived long enough to tell him her story and give him a locket bearing her name. Another story was that she had lost her memory in an accident and was later buried in Alexandria, Virginia under the gravestone that gives the occupant's name merely as "Female Stranger."

Other more lurid accounts say that the Patriot was boarded by pirates who slaughtered everyone aboard. Another was that the inhabitants of Nag's Head, Carolina, were wreckers who lured ships towards the land so that they could pillage the resulting shipwreck. They discovered a woman's body in the aftermath of one disaster they had caused and simply buried her quietly.

In 1869, a doctor was treating an old lady living in Nag's Head, who paid his fee by giving him a fine oil painting of a young lady. She claimed this had been washed ashore in her youth. The doctor became convinced this was a portrait of Theodosia Burr, though this has not been proven.



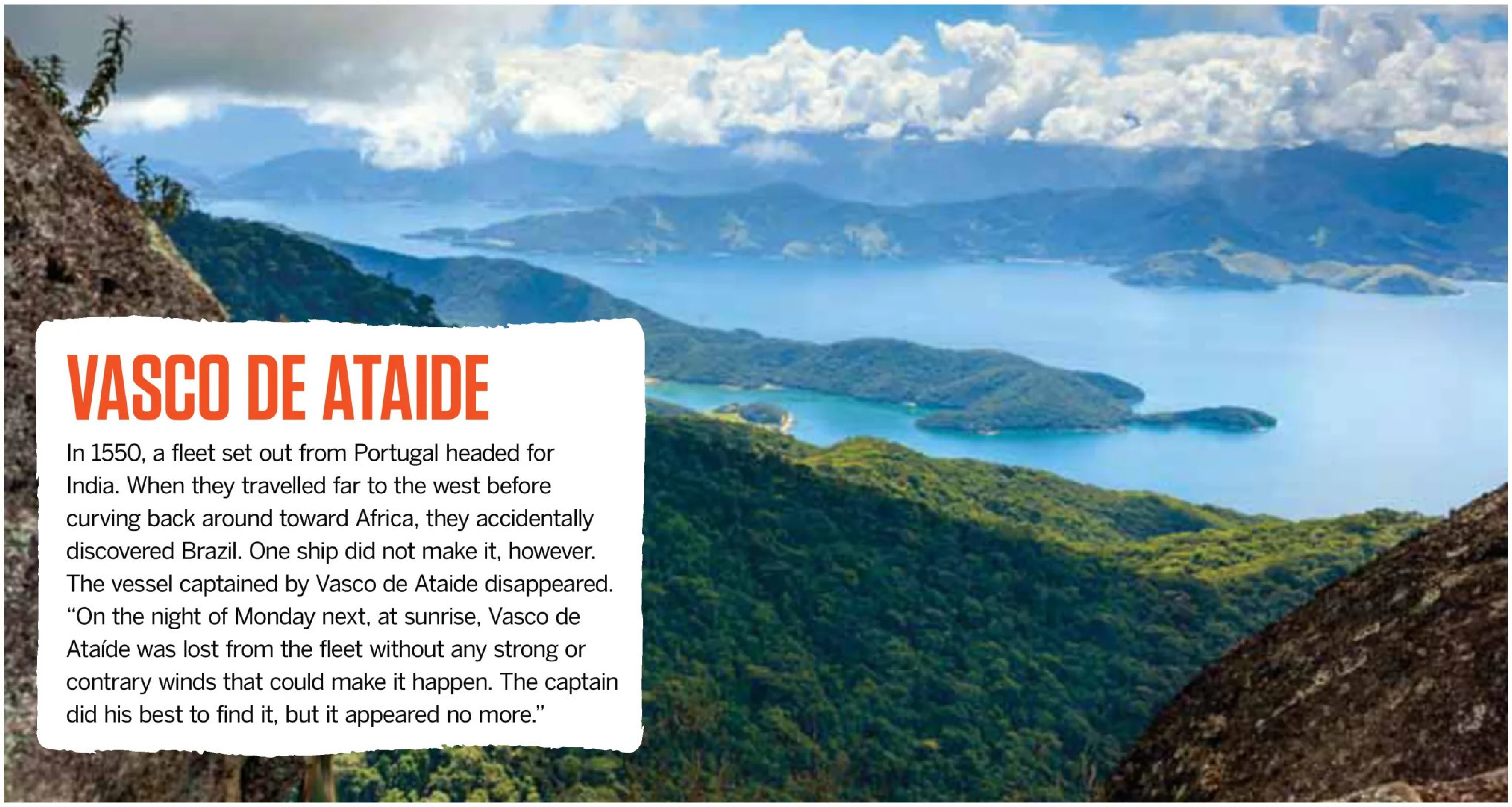
The Nag's Head Portrait purportedly shows Theodosia Burr and was discovered washed up on a beach after her disappearance

HENRY HUDSON

Henry Hudson led several expeditions in Canada in search of a Northwest Passage that would allow faster travel by sea to Asia. While exploring in 1610, his ship became trapped in ice. When the ice melted, Hudson desired to venture onwards but his crew mutinied. Hudson, his young son, and a few others were placed in a small boat and set adrift. Despite all later efforts, no trace of them was ever found.

THE SEA DRAGON

An attempt to cross the Pacific in a Chinese junk went disastrously wrong in 1939. Richard Halliburton commissioned a junk to be build in Hong Kong and fitted it with a diesel engine. He planned to sail to San Francisco but the ship proved leaky, top heavy, and the crew was beset by illness. One of the last messages the Sea Dragon sent was "Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here instead of me." It then vanished without a trace.



VASCO DE ATAIDE

In 1550, a fleet set out from Portugal headed for India. When they travelled far to the west before curving back around toward Africa, they accidentally discovered Brazil. One ship did not make it, however. The vessel captained by Vasco de Ataide disappeared. "On the night of Monday next, at sunrise, Vasco de Ataíde was lost from the fleet without any strong or contrary winds that could make it happen. The captain did his best to find it, but it appeared no more."

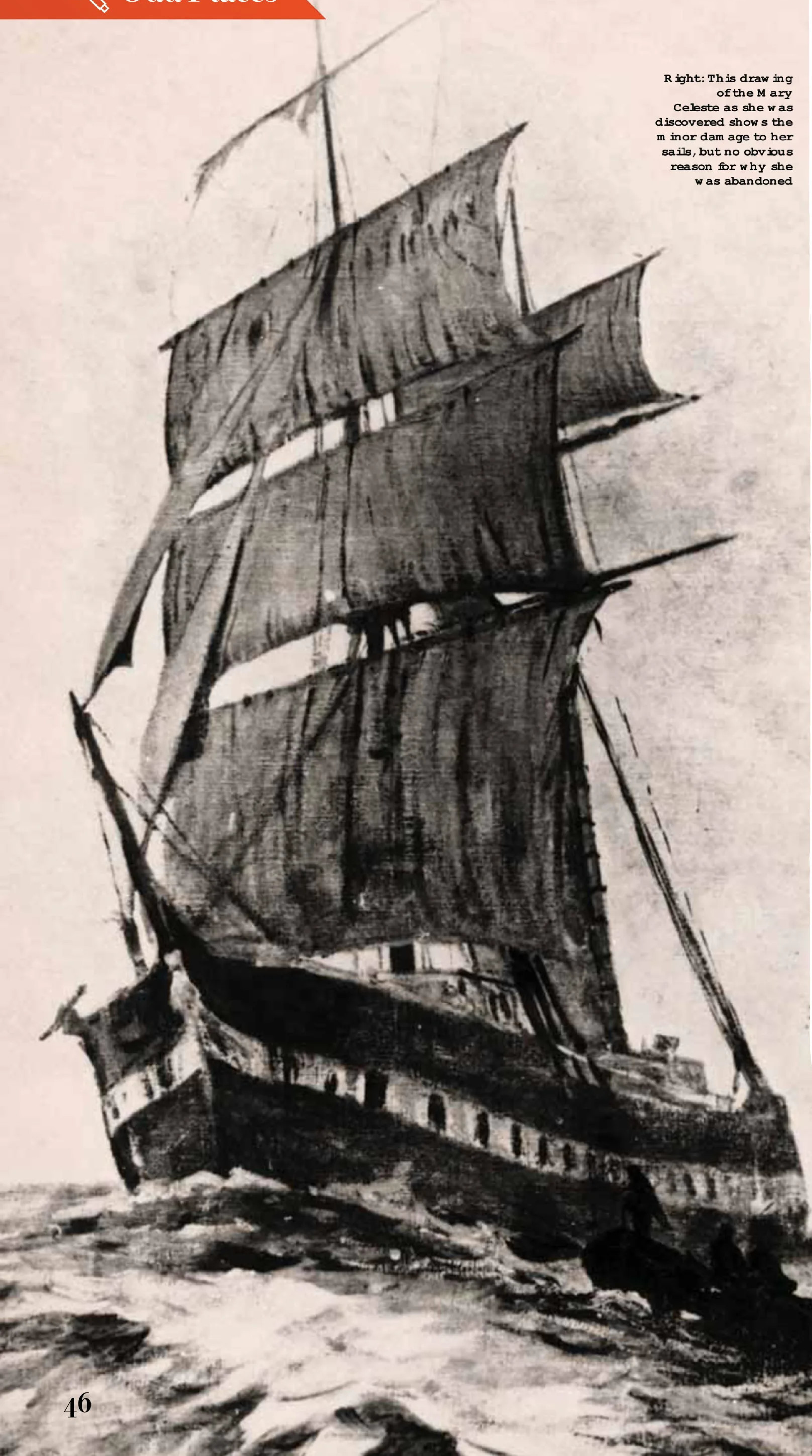
AMELIA EARHART

The pioneering flyer Amelia Earhart broke many aviation records during her career. She was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. In 1937, she set off on a round-the-world flying expedition with her navigator, Fred Noonan. While crossing the Pacific, radio signals were picked up from Earhart showing the plane was lost. Soon transmissions ceased. The plane and its passengers were never seen again, though some claimed to have heard transmissions from the crashed plane.

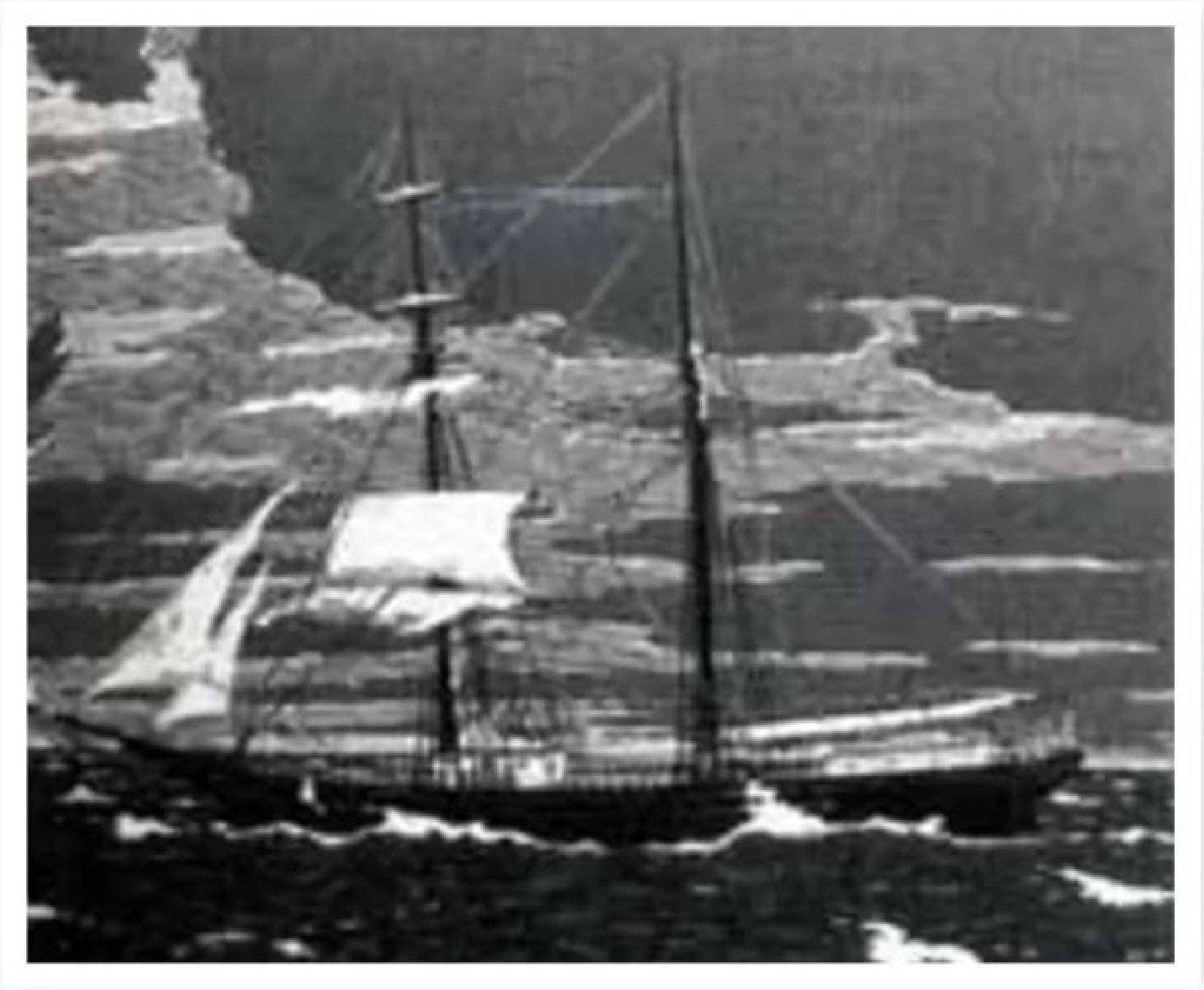
HMS HAWK

With the Napoleonic Wars raging, the British navy kept a close guard on the English Channel. It was while patrolling and looking for enemy vessels that HMS Hawk, captained by Commander James Tippett, spotted a strange sail. They set off in pursuit – and were never heard from again. The ship was well-armed, had enough crew, and weather should not have been an issue. Were they sunk by an enemy or overcome by some other disaster?

> ‘While crossing the Pacific radio signals were picked up from Earhart showing the plane was lost. Soon transmissions ceased”



Right: This drawing of the Mary Celeste as she was discovered shows the minor damage to her sails, but no obvious reason for why she was abandoned



MARY CELESTE

The most famous case of a crew disappearing at sea remains unsolved to this day

When the ship Dei Gratia approached the merchant ship Mary Celeste off the Azores islands in 1872, it found her abandoned. The Mary Celeste was adrift but still otherwise intact, and several of her sails were still up. The valuable cargo of alcohol was undisturbed in its hold. Everything seemed to be fine, except that its lifeboat was missing and there was no one on board.

From all evidence on the ship, it appeared the crew of the Mary Celeste had boarded the lifeboat and left in an orderly fashion. The captain's navigation equipment had been taken. A log of the ship's journey stopped over a week before the Mary Celeste was discovered.

No satisfactory explanation exists for why the crew abandoned ship. There was no evidence of a fire, and water found in the hold was not deep enough to be dangerous. Everything from undersea earthquakes, to waterspouts, to fear of an explosion have been offered as to why the crew departed in the lifeboat. All we know is that they were never seen again.

THE FLANNAN ISLE LIGHTHOUSE INCIDENT

How did three lighthouse keepers on a remote island simply disappear?

Eilean Mòr is a small island in the Flannan Isles, off the coast of Scotland. As the island was a danger to navigation, a lighthouse was built on it to help guide ships at sea.

The light was first ignited in 1899 and just one year later, a ship passing in bad weather reported that the lighthouse had not been giving any signal. A relief ship, the Hesperus, was sent to investigate.

The crew of the Hesperus sent up a flare to announce their arrival but there was no answer from the crew on the island. The three men who had been stationed at the lighthouse, James Ducat, Thomas Marshall, and Donald McArthur, were all found to be missing. The clock on the wall had stopped. The table was set for a meal. Only the lighthouse canary gave any signs of life.

An investigation suggested that the three men had been blown off the island's cliffs by a violent storm. That did not stop others suggesting sea serpents, madness, and kidnapping as the real cause of the disappearance.

> "The clock on the wall had stopped. The table was set for a meal. Only the lighthouse canary gave any signs of life"

Did a violent storm cause the disappearance of three lighthouse keepers or was something more mysterious to blame?

THE SEA BIRD

The merchant ship Sea Bird was found run aground on Easton's Beach in Rhode Island in 1750. No one was on board and her longboat was missing, but a pot of coffee was discovered still boiling. It seemed as if the crew must have departed for some reason in the boat when they saw land. The only living things aboard were a cat and a dog. The ship was reclaimed and renamed the Beach Bird.

LIFE BOAT NUMBER 5

The SS Valencia sank after striking a reef at night near Cape Beale, close to Vancouver Island. 100 people died despite many of the lifeboats being launched. There were tales that a local fisherman spotted one of the lifeboats six months later in a nearby sea cave, with the skeletons of survivors still aboard. Others say that ghostly lifeboats can still be seen being rowed to this day. Lifeboat number five was actually discovered still afloat 27 years after the sinking.

SS BAYCHIMO

The Baychimo carried furs from Canada to Britain successfully throughout the 1920s, but in 1931 she was abandoned after becoming trapped in pack ice. The crew built a shelter on land but the ship disappeared in a blizzard and they thought she must have sunk. Days later, an Inuit trader said he had seen the Baychimo floating away. In the years that followed she was sighted several times and even boarded. It was last seen in 1969 but could still be travelling the ocean to this day.

THE OURANG MEDAN

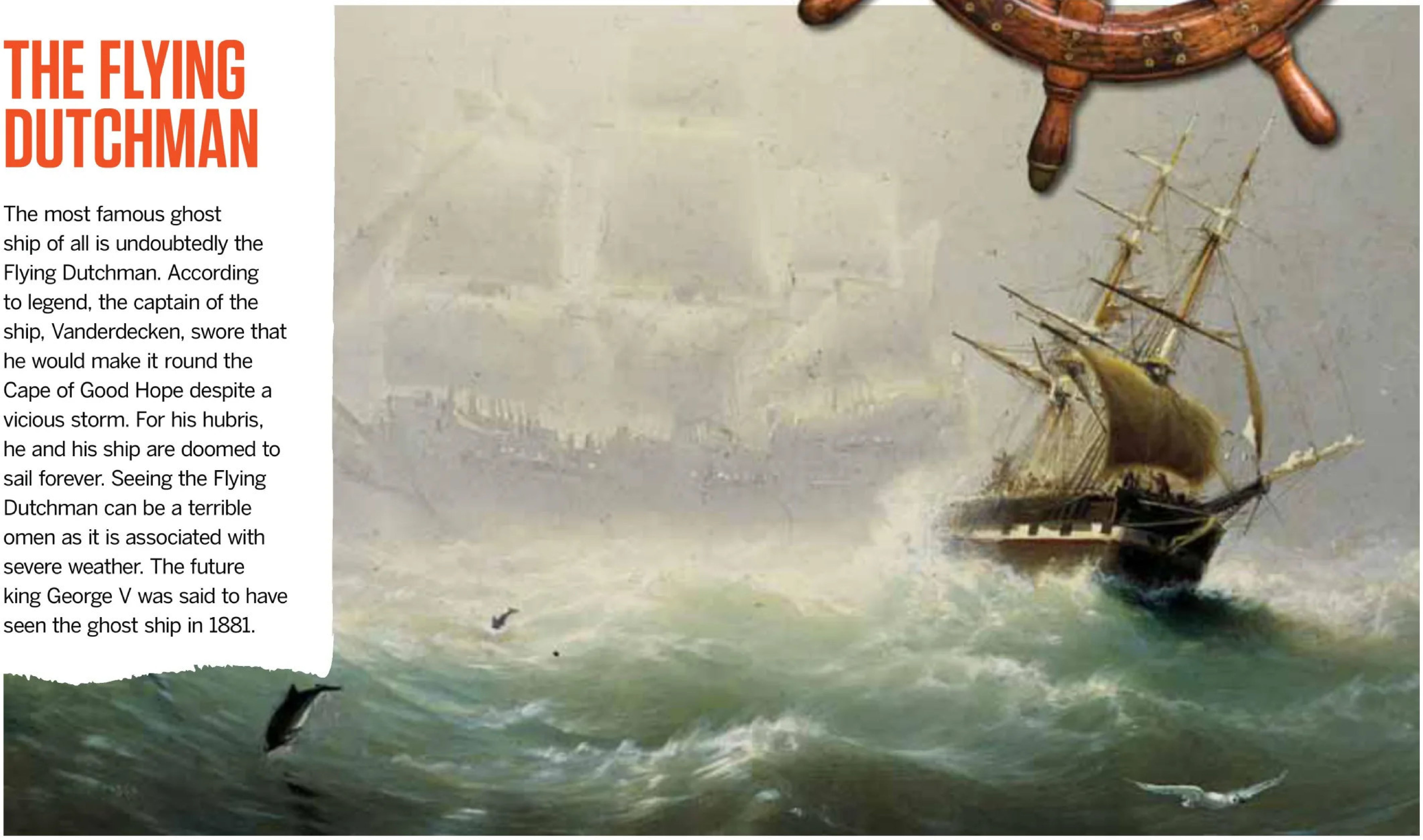
According to a tale that has been widely retold, in the 1940s a Dutch boat called the Ourang Medan sent out a distress signal while sailing near Indonesia. When it was boarded, every member of the crew was found dead with horrible grimaces on their faces and staring up at the sun. Before an investigation could take place, the ship caught fire and sank. That's the story at least – no record of the Ourang Medan can be located.

THE OCTAVIUS

When the trading ship the Octavius departed China in 1762, it chose to stray and return to England by the Northwest Passage around Canada. It was discovered in 1775 near Greenland having made the crossing – but with everyone on board frozen and perfectly preserved. The captain was discovered sitting at his desk with his pen in hand. Unfortunatel,y no evidence of the Octavius or its discovery has yet been found dating to before the 1820s, suggesting that this was a legendary happening.

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

The most famous ghost ship of all is undoubtedly the Flying Dutchman. According to legend, the captain of the ship, Vanderdecken, swore that he would make it round the Cape of Good Hope despite a vicious storm. For his hubris, he and his ship are doomed to sail forever. Seeing the Flying Dutchman can be a terrible omen as it is associated with severe weather. The future king George V was said to have seen the ghost ship in 1881.



THE JOYITA

In 1955, the small ship Joyita was sailing from Samoa on a trip expected to last two days. It was found adrift a month later and 600 miles from its last known location. The 25 people aboard were all missing. Bloody bandages were found on deck and the lights were left on, suggesting something had occurred at night. Much of the cargo had been dumped, perhaps for buoyancy. The crew were never located.

THE PRINCESS AUGUSTA

The British ship HMS Princess Augusta sailed from Rotterdam in 1738. It's voyage started with illness killing 200 passengers and many of the crew, before it wrecked on Block Island in the state of Rhode Island. Ever since, there have been tales of strange lights on the island and sightings of a burning ship still sailing nearby. The screams of a passenger who refused to abandon the sinking vessel can still be heard from the phantom ship.

THE ZEBRINA

The Zebrina was a sailing barge that was still being used to ferry coal during World War I. In 1917, she was discovered run aground in France. There was no damage at all but her five crew members were gone. Some theorised that they had been swept overboard. Others thought that they may have been taken by a German submarine but later killed when the submarine was sunk by the British.

THE RESOLVEN

The Resolven was a trading ship plying the waters around Newfoundland when it was discovered abandoned in 1884. Strangely, the log had been filled in to within six hours of it being found and a fire was still lit on board. All the crew and passengers were gone, as was the lifeboat. One spar on the mast was broken but there was no other damage. The ship was refitted but sank three years later in a wreck.

OPERATION MINCEMEAT

How one dead body pulled off one of the greatest deceptions in history

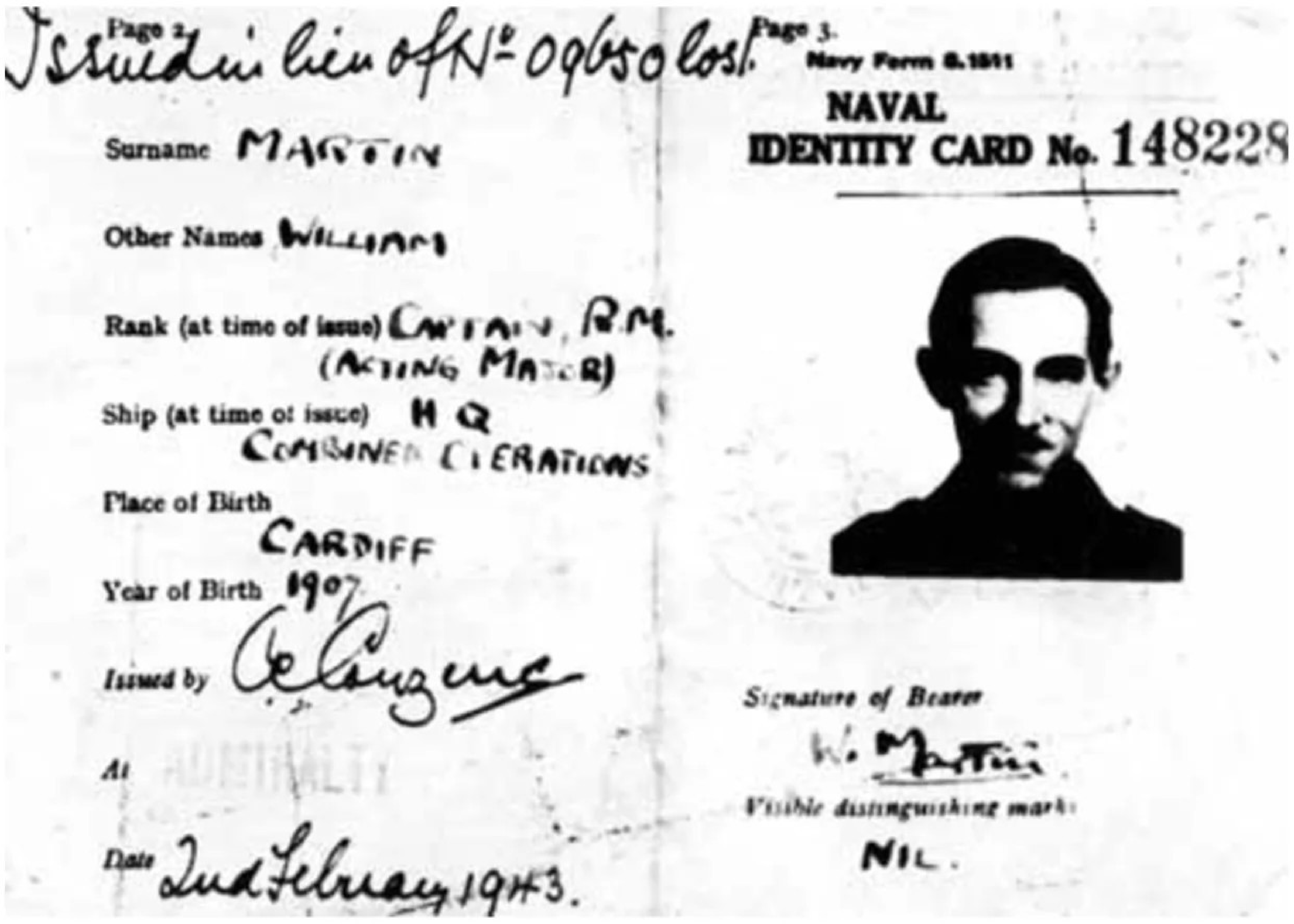
In 1943, the body of Captain William Martin washed ashore on the coast of Spain. Chained to his wrist was a briefcase, the contents of which would change the course of World War II. The only problem was that Captain William Martin did not exist. Known as Operation Mincemeat, the placing of a dead body in the sea to fool enemy intelligence was just part of the greatest act of military subterfuge ever seen.

Operation Mincemeat began with the Trout Memo of 1939, which suggested the ways the enemy might be lured into traps, like a trout is lured by a fly fisherman. The memo may have been written by the creator of James Bond, Ian Fleming. From this, the idea of planting false military intelligence on a dead body was conceived.

The body used belonged to Glyndwr Michael, a homeless man who had died after eating rat poison. The corpse was kept cold and dressed as an officer. On his body, various bits of false information were placed, including a photograph of a fictional girlfriend. The body was loaded into a submarine and released off the Spainish coast. Most important were the documents in the briefcase – revealing that the Allies would invade Greece. In truth, the plan was to invade Italy after conquering Sicily.

Spain was technically neutral in World War II, but it was well-known that many Nazi agents were at work there. The Spanish authorities were informed soon after the body was found by a fisherman and they retrieved the briefcase. An autopsy was performed, but with all surface evidence pointing to the body being from an airplane crash it was not a detailed one. The briefcase was due to be returned to the Allies. While in Spanish hands, however, the documents inside were secretly extracted from their sealed envelopes and photographed by German spies. They returned to the files and believed they had uncovered ultra-secret military intelligence. What they did not notice was that a single eyelash had been placed with the most important document. When its absence was noticed by the Allies, they knew that the documents had been read.

Prime Minister Churchill was told that the plan had worked with the message "Mincemeat swallowed rod, line and sinker." The Germans duly shifted their focus away from Sicily and towards the east. When the Allies swiftly took Sicily, Mussolini was forced from office and Italy began negotiations for peace.



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Page 2.

Surname MARTIN

Other Names WILLIAM

Rank (at time of issue) CAPTAIN, R.M.
(ACTING MAJOR)

Ship (at time of issue) H Q
COMBINED OPERATIONS

Place of Birth
CARDIFF

Year of Birth 1907

Issued by

At ADMIRALTY

Date 2nd February 1943.

Page 3.
Navy Form S.1511

NAVAL
IDENTITY CARD No. 148228

Signature of Bearer
W. Martin

Visible distinguishing marks
NIL.

The fake naval identity card for 'Major Martin" was just one of the pieces of evidence planted as part of Operation Mincemeat

This is the photograph of the fictional girlfriend that was in the briefcase

> "The corpse was kept cold and dressed as an officer. On his body various bits of false information were placed, including a photograph of a fictional girlfriend"

Images source: Alamy, Getty, Wiki

THE UPSIDE-DOWN MOUNTAIN:

ESOTERIC BUGERACH

In 2012, esoteric enthusiasts turned their attention to a mountain in France and waited for the end of the world

WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

Known as the Upside-Down Mountain, the Pic de Bugarach has become a place of pilgrimage for students of the esoteric

The Pic de Bugarach, the highest peak in the Corbières Massif range in France, is a very singular sort of mountain. It is, essentially, upside down, as its uppermost layer is the result of a thrust fault in the earth's crust, meaning that it is older than the layers beneath it. For this reason, it has become known as the Upside-Down Mountain.

The mountain's geological quirks make it a place of particular fascination to esoteric enthusiasts, who believe that it is no innocent natural structure. Instead, this dedicated group believe that the mountain is actually hollow and contains an alien spacecraft and its crew. It was these aliens, they believed, who would save them when the end of the world came about on 21 December 2012, as they claimed was predicted by the Mayan calendar. Why they arrived at the conclusion that 21 December 2012 was the date of the apocalypse has never been fully explained, but the esoterics – as the villagers came to call them – were certain that the end was nigh.

As the date approached, tens of thousands of believers began to arrive in the tiny French village of Bugarach and set up camp on the mountain itself, keen to be at the centre of the action when the aliens emerged to carry them to safety. Some even bought land and began to dig bunkers, a place to hide in case the aliens missed their cue. As concerns were raised over the behaviour of the visitors and the sheer volume of people who were arriving, police sealed off access to the mountain. Fearing a doomsday cult or a potential mass suicide, what had started as a quirky story had suddenly acquired a more sinister flavour. Thankfully, no such tragedy occurred.

> "It was these aliens, they believed, who would save them when the end of the world came about on 21 December 2012"

As history has shown, the mountain did not open and neither the aliens nor their spaceship emerged. Likewise, the world kept turning and those who had come to camp on the mountain had no choice but to turn around and go home. More than a decade has passed, but the mystery of the Upside-Down Mountain at Bugarach has not dimmed. With no new date set for the next brush with the apocalypse, the villagers at Bugarach can breathe a sigh of relief for the time being. However, visitors still make the pilgrimage to the little village in France, hoping that one day the Upside-Down Mountain might reveal its arcane secrets.

Visitors flocked to Bugarach in 2012, convinced that the world would end and aliens would emerge from the mountain. In the event, neither occurred

Images source: Getty

STRANGE FOLK

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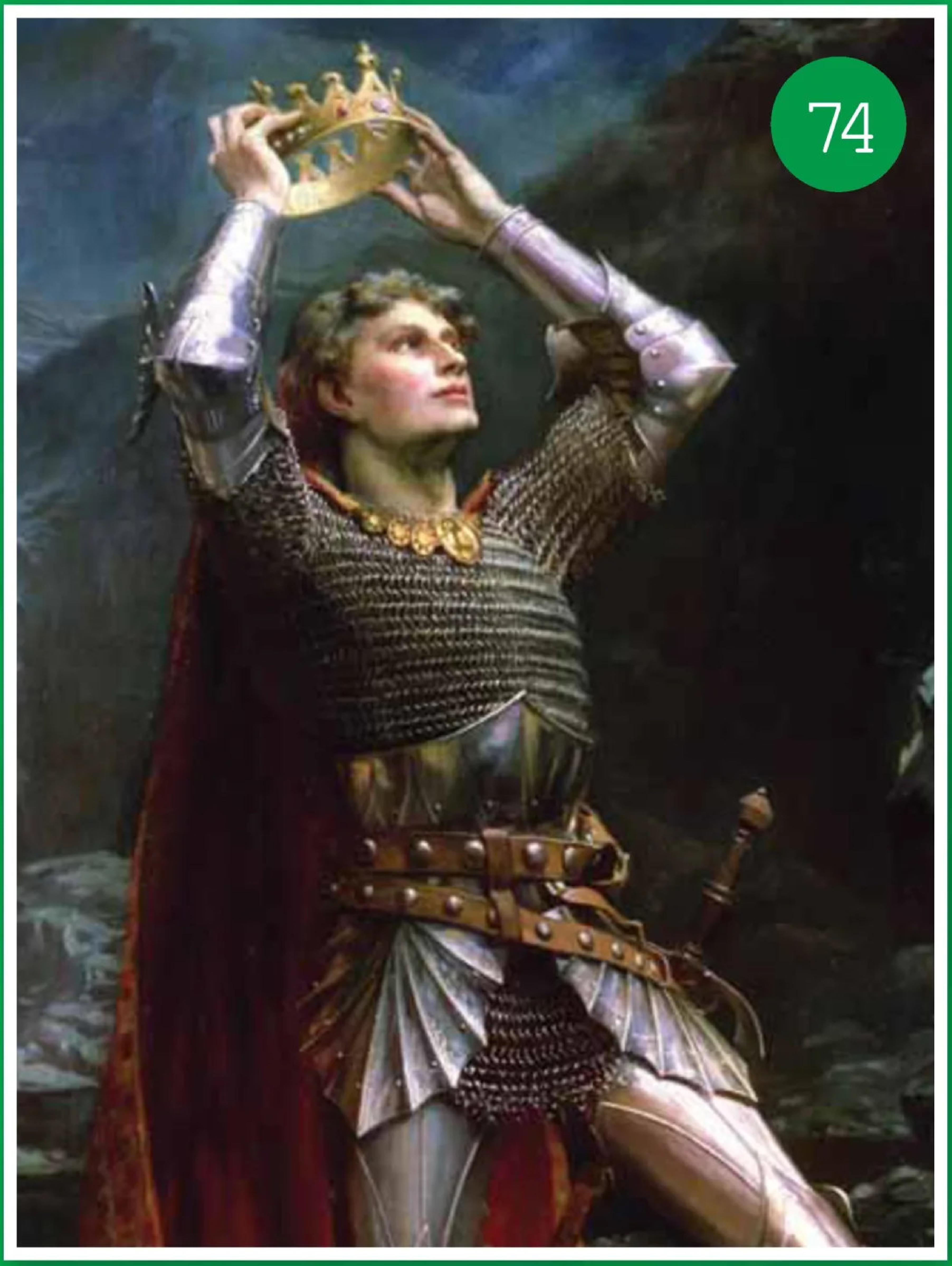
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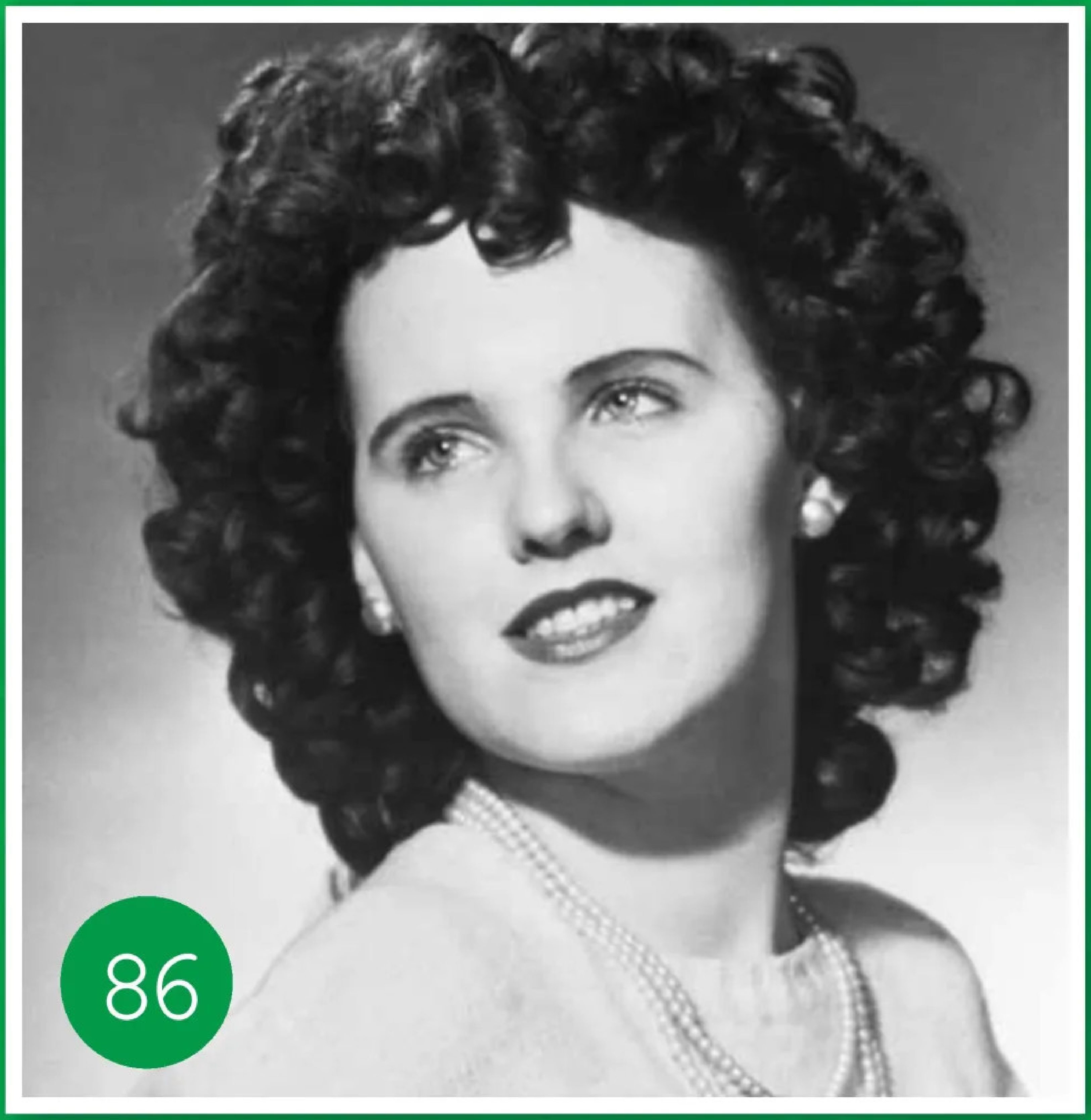
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VANISHED INTO THIN AIR

The bizarre disappearances of various famous individuals have instigated numerous conspiracy theories, but will we ever find out what really happened to these lost souls?

WRITTEN BY **JOANNA ELPHICK**

Losing a loved one is always a painful experience, but after the funeral grieving friends and family can slowly begin to rebuild their lives and move on. Sadly, when someone simply disappears never to be seen again, the desperate spark of hope that they will someday return stunts the healing process, denying that all-important sense of closure. Not even the greatest of magicians can really vanish into thin air, so where did these poor souls go? A lack of concrete answers inevitably leads to half-truths, hearsay and supposition, all wrapped up in a tantalising shroud of mystery… and none more so than the suspicious case of Lord Lucan.

Images source: Getty Images

RICHARD BINGHAM

7TH EARL OF LUCAN

DATE WENT MISSING:

8 NOVEMBER 1974

The Earl of Lucan, known to his aristocratic chums as 'Lucky Lucan', had been rather less fortunate than usual in the months leading up to his mysterious disappearance. An obsessive gambler, he had recently lost his winning streak and was now living off his overdraft. His family life had also unravelled. His wife, Veronica, had forced him out of the family home two years earlier, claiming domestic abuse. Such allegations were almost certainly true since the former member of the Coldstream Guards had a reputation for violence and an explosive temper. Veronica had recently won a battle against her estranged husband, who had been fighting to retain control of their three children. Lucan had been devastated as the judge handed sole custody to the woman he had grown to hate.

Despite the legal bills and mounting household expenses, Lucan chose to forget his sorrows at the Clermont Club, an exclusive, members-only gambling club in Mayfair, owned by his friend John Aspinall. Veronica had continued to live at the family home in Lower Belgrave Street with her children and the nanny, Sandra Rivett. On the night of 7 November, Sandra shouldn't have been there since it was usually her night off but, unfortunately for her, she'd swapped it that week in order to help out.

At 8.40pm, Sandra offered to make some tea and bring it up. When she didn't return, Lady Lucan decided to investigate the holdup, venturing down to the kitchens, only to be jumped upon and beaten repeatedly with a lead pipe. She recognised the assailant's voice as that of her husband. Fighting for her life, Lady Lucan grabbed his testicles and squeezed. Lord Lucan seemed to calm down and went to get a cloth to clean his wife's face, leaving Veronica a window of opportunity to escape.

At 9.45pm she burst into the nearby Plumbers Arms pub, screaming for help. When the police arrived, Sandra Rivett's body was discovered in the basement, wrapped in a canvas mail bag.

Lucan had almost certainly mistaken Sandra for his wife and bludgeoned her to death.

Lucan was seen one last time, having shown up at his friends' house 42 miles away in Uckfield. Susan Maxwell-Scott listened to his fanciful story of an unknown assailant attacking his wife and the nanny, which he'd witnessed through the window. He claimed he'd gone in to help and interrupted the attack, but Veronica had screamed that Lucan had paid someone to kill her, so he fled. He telephoned his mother just after midnight, asking her to collect the children, and left, promising to "sort things out". He was never seen again.

So where did he go? Some claim he drowned himself in Newhaven Harbour through sheer guilt at killing Rivett. His car had been found abandoned nearby. In 2012, Shirley Robey, who worked for Lucan's close friend John Aspinall, claimed to have overheard a conversation between his friends, stating that he had escaped to Africa. Veronica was extremely sceptical of this suggestion, since he liked his creature comforts and had a dislike for foreign places. Aspinall owned a zoo, which many believe was Lucan's final resting place. Lucan knew that, without proof of death, probate could not be granted for a minimum of seven years, meaning his children would be old enough to deal with their own estate affairs and his wife would lose all control. Clermont Club regulars believe that he shot himself at the zoo and had his body fed to the tigers. It is a gruesome tale but one that might just be true. Aspinall's mother apparently told police at the time, "Last I heard of him, he was being fed to the tigers at my son's zoo." Either way, 'Lucky Lucan' hasn't been seen for over 45 years.

DONALD CHARLES ALFRED CROWHURST

DATE WENT MISSING:

8 NOVEMBER 1974

Donald Crowhurst was little more than a weekend sailor whose reckless decision to compete in the Sunday Times Golden Globe Race – a non-stop, single-handed, round-the-world yacht race – was destined to end in tragedy. Sadly, the £5,000 cash prize was too great a temptation for a man facing financial ruin and so, with little regard for the devastating impact it would have on his wife and children, he set off on 31 October 1968.

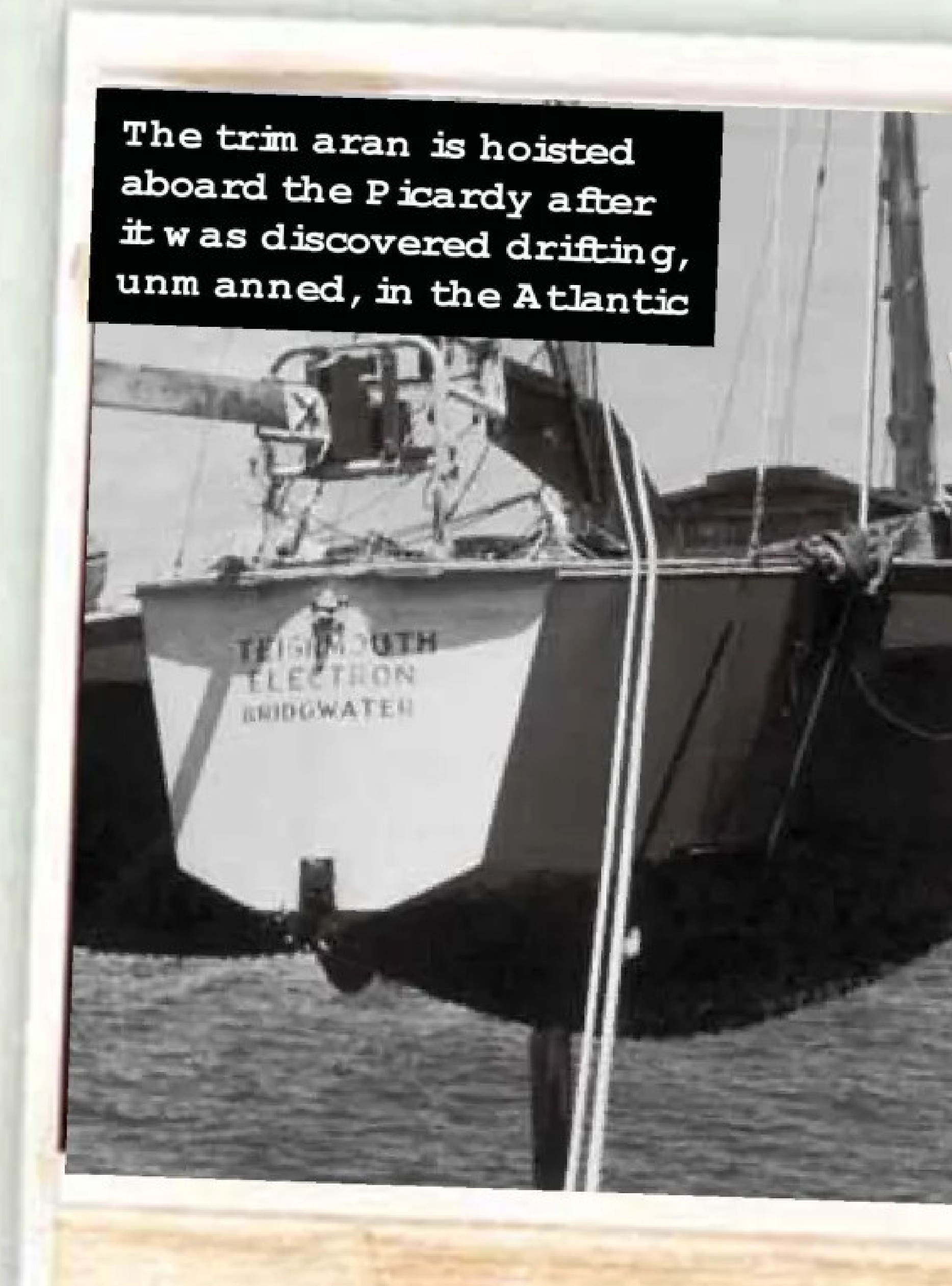
Things began to go wrong almost immediately since the 40-foot trimaran, the Teignmouth Electron, was an inappropriate choice for such a dangerous voyage. Lack of time and a general slapdash approach meant that he had set off without completing any of his safety devices and had been too busy giving interviews to the press to pack many of his necessary supplies.

By December, he had realised that he was way out of his depth but dared not quit the race, knowing that this would lead to enormous humiliation and financial ruin.

He chose instead to cheat, shutting down his radio and planning to wait in the South Atlantic until the other sailors began the final leg. He would simply falsify the navigation logbook and join the rest of the racers on the return journey to England.

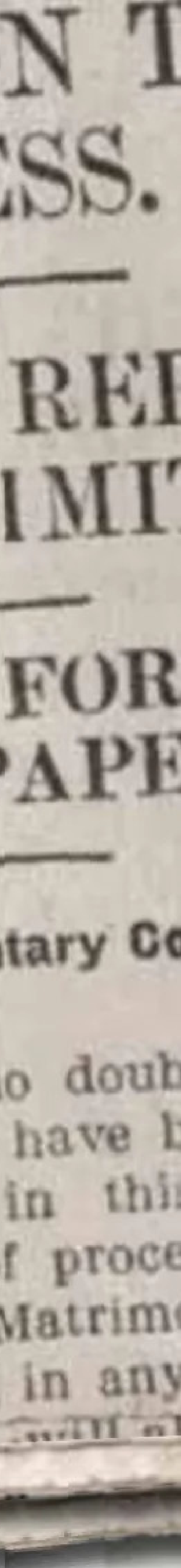
Back at home, his vague, sporadic radio reports led people to believe that he was winning, particularly since some other competitors had dropped out, but Crowhurst was, in fact, confused, lost and panicking. The last radio contact was made on 29 June and the final entry in the log book was dated 1 July. Nine days later, the Teignmouth Electron was discovered drifting in the Atlantic Ocean. Donald Crowhurst had simply disappeared.

The log books depicted a man in absolute torment, wracked with guilt from his own subterfuge and terrified of discovery. If he had won the race, experts would have spotted his false entries and the cash prize would have been withdrawn, leaving him humiliated and his family in financial distress. Philosophical ramblings and bizarre poems show his steady descent into madness. Whether he jumped into the icy waters of his own volition or was knocked overboard by a rogue wave can never be established. The state of the boat suggests he took his own life in a desperate attempt to avoid facing what awaited him on dry land. The winning sailor, Robin Knox-Johnston, donated his prize money to Crowhurst's widow, Clare, and his four children, who were left to face the press and deal with the financial burden of his debts and disappearance alone.



The trimaran is hoisted aboard the Picardy after it was discovered drifting, unmanned, in the Atlantic

Donald proudly poses with the family he left behind; wife Clare and children Rachel, Simon, Roger and James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MAJOR GLENN MILLER

DATE WENT MISSING:

8 NOVEMBER 1974

Towards the end of World War II, a single-engine Noorduyn Norseman aircraft left England, bound for Paris. Onboard were two Air Force officers and the bandleader Glenn Miller, who was heading to France to organise a concert for the troops. But, somewhere over the Channel, the plane vanished.

There had been no distress signal and no wreckage recovered, so a satisfactory conclusion to the mystery seemed highly unlikely. However, two theories have claimed to hold the answer.

On that fateful day, a formation of Lancaster bombers returning from an aborted raid on Germany had been ordered to jettison their bombs over the Channel before landing. One navigator claimed that a Noorduyn Norseman plane had been accidentally hit during the procedure. Was this the aircraft carrying Miller? This seemed to be the likely explanation, until the notebooks of a plane spotter appeared on TV show *The Antiques Roadshow*. Richard Anderton was 17 when he spotted Miller's plane overhead in Reading, proving it took a major diversion on its way to Paris, and making it impossible for the plane to have been in the bomb jettison zone at the time of the incident. It's now believed the plane was flying low due to poor visibility, and crashed when its fuel lines froze.

Bandleader Glenn Miller in his US Air Force uniform in 1942

A Noorduyn Norseman, similar to the plane transporting Miller on his last flight

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Mrs. Agatha Christie as she wa

Did Christie use a series of disguises to disappear from the public gaze? *The Daily News* certainly thought so...

AGATHA CHRISTIE

DATE WENT MISSING

3–14 DECEMBER 1926

On a cold evening in early December, during the height of her fame, writer Agatha Christie kissed her daughter goodnight, walked out of her Berkshire home and drove off into the night, only to disappear in a puff of exhaust smoke. For 11 days, the police and public searched in vain until, just as suddenly, she reappeared.

The disappearance instigated one of the largest manhunts ever, involving more than 1,000 police officers, bloodhounds, aeroplanes and hundreds of volunteers. Her car was found partly covered in bushes near Guildford, abandoned by a spring. The car offered up little information except that she had left her fur coat and driver's licence behind, and the headlights were still on.

Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks called upon Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and fellow crime writer Dorothy L Sayers to help who, in turn, brought in mediums, but to no avail. However, on 14 December, a musician working in the Old Swan Hotel, Harrogate, called the police, claiming to have spotted Agatha dancing in the ballroom. The lady of mystery had been found.

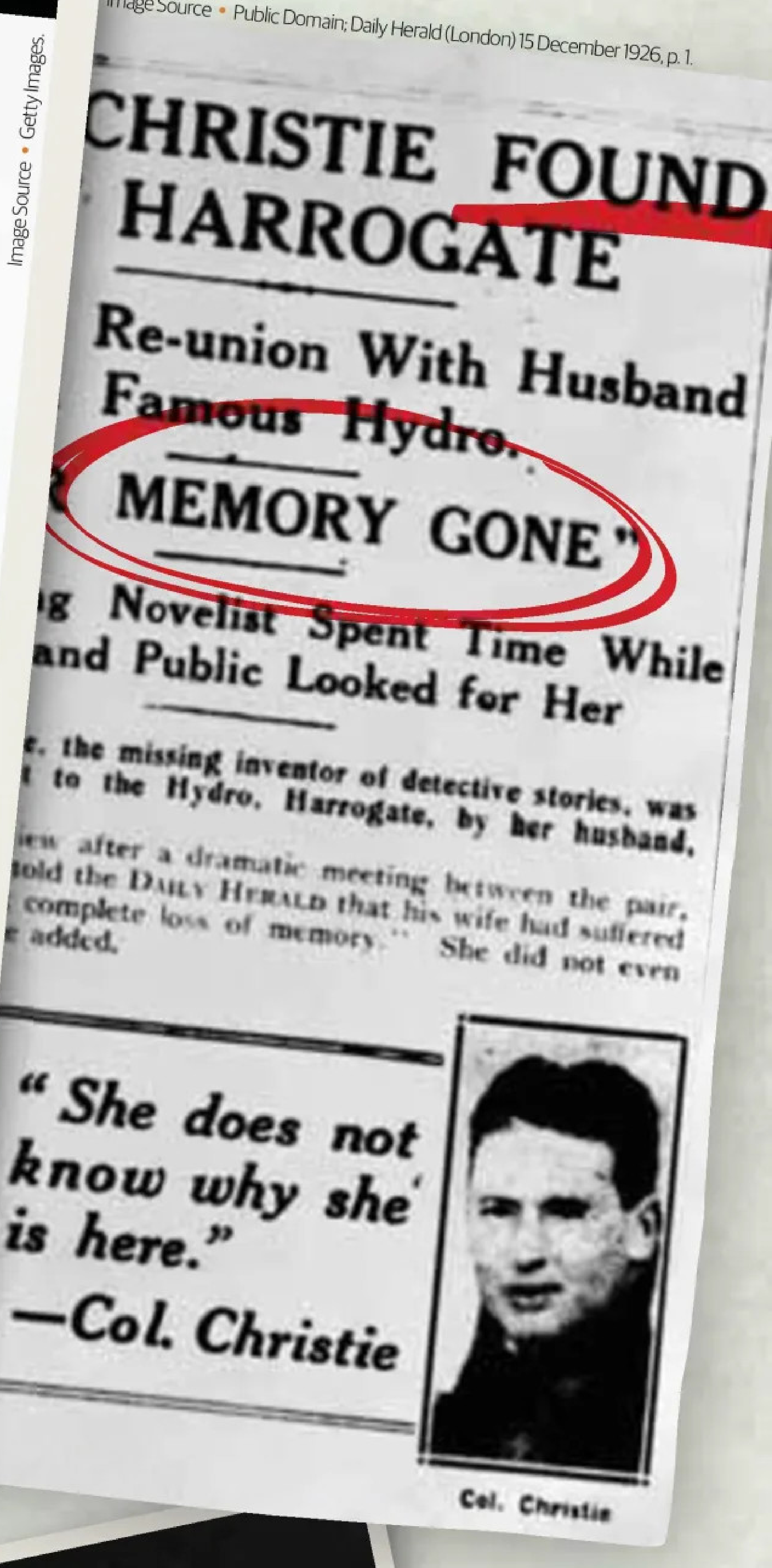
But why did she do it? Although a few cynics believed at the time that this was a wild publicity stunt for her latest book, it is most commonly thought that she was suffering from psychogenic amnesia following the recent death of her beloved mother and the discovery that her husband, Archie, had been having an affair with a secretary, Nancy Neele. Her overwhelming grief had inadvertently placed her at the centre of her very own mystery.

A young and highly successful Agatha Christie

Image Source • Getty Images

"A few cynics believed at the time that this was a wild publicity stunt for her latest book"

Image Source • Public Domain; Daily Herald (London) 15 December 1926, p. 1.



CHRISTIE FOUND
HARROGATE

Re-union With Husband
Famous Hydro.

"MEMORY GONE"

g Novelist Spent Time While
and Public Looked for Her

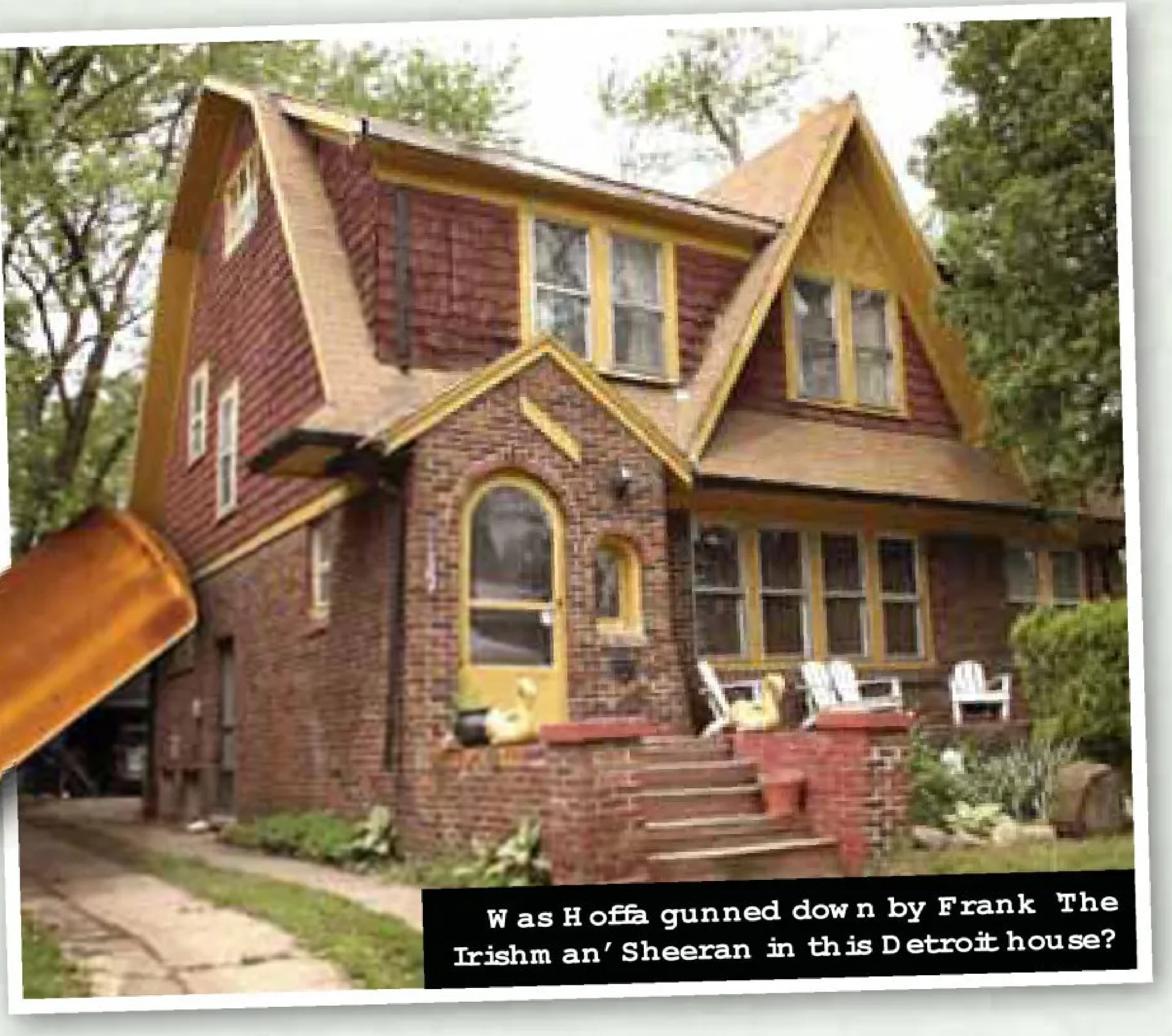
, the missing inventor of detective stories, was
t to the Hydro, Harrogate, by her husband,
iew after a dramatic meeting between the pair,
told the DAILY HERALD that his wife had suffered
complete loss of memory." She did not even
e added.

"She does not know why she is here."
—Col. Christie

Col. Christie

Image Source • Getty Images

FBI agents search for the remains of Hoffa in Michigan after receiving a tip from former mobster Tony Zerilli in 2003



Was Hoffa gunned down by Frank 'The Irishman' Sheeran in this Detroit house?

"It was thought Hoffa's corpse had been ground up and thrown into the Florida swamps"

JAMES RIDDLE HOFFA

DATE WENT MISSING

30 JULY 1975

Jimmy Hoffa was barely out of his teens when he led his first strike, and from this point on he shared his life with mobsters, racketeers, the Mafia and gambling moguls. Through threats of violence, dubious payoffs, kickbacks and sweetheart deals, he rose up through the ranks of America's largest union, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, ultimately becoming its president in the 1950s.

President Kennedy's brother, Robert, loathed the union leader, a hatred that led to the formation of the Justice Department's 'Get Hoffa Squad', which attempted to charge him with everything from extortion to jury tampering, resulting in an eight-year sentence. Later that year, he was also convicted of fraud and received a further five years.

After endless appeals, he was eventually locked up in 1967. Hoffa intended to run the union from prison through its acting president, Frank Fitzsimmons, but Fitzsimmons solidified his hold on the role. When Hoffa's sentence was commuted and he was released in 1971, he attempted to claw back some of his power, but this proved to be difficult. Despite support from President Nixon, who'd since come into power, Hoffa struggled to regain his former position due to a term of his release from prison, which barred him from holding any union office for ten years. Furious and humiliated, he began conducting business with some dangerous individuals, making numerous enemies as he went.

On 30 July 1975, Hoffa arranged to have lunch with a group of syndicate thugs, but when they failed to show he phoned his wife at approximately 2.15pm, then waited in his car outside the restaurant. When he didn't come home that night, she called the police. The following day, the car was discovered, unlocked, but Hoffa had vanished.

The FBI were quickly called in and, over the next ten years, 200 G-Men (slang for 'government men') were assigned to Hoffa's disappearance. Everyone was of the opinion that he'd been murdered but no-one could fathom out who had done the deed or where the body had been hidden.

Theories were raised and duly filed. At one point it was thought that contract killer Charles Allen had ground up his corpse into little pieces and had it thrown in the Florida swamps. Others claimed he'd been killed by hitman Donald 'Tony The Greek' Frankos and his body buried under the Giants Stadium. In 2004, Hoffa's one-time friend, Frank 'the Irishman' Sheeran, gave a deathbed confession, pointing to a home in the suburbs of Detroit as the murder scene.

More than 16,000 pages of reports were written up but whittling down the never-ending list of suspects proved impossible – after all, he'd been an incredibly unpopular individual on both sides of the law. In 1982, Jimmy Hoffa was declared legally dead but, without a body, we'll never know if he really is.

Image Source • Getty Images

James R Hoffa in 1957, testifying before the Senate Rackets Committee in Washington, DC

RAOUL GUSTAF WALLENBERG

20547007348
POLAROID

Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg, the Swedish architect, businessman, diplomat and brave humanitarian

DATE WENT MISSING

17 JANUARY 1945

Raoul Wallenberg's youth set him up for the adventures and high drama he was to face in later life and gave him the skills that he needed to accomplish the outstanding feats of bravery that he would ultimately be remembered for. Born in Sweden in 1912 into a wealthy academic family, young Wallenberg was given an excellent education. He travelled extensively, before returning to Stockholm where he began working for the Central European Trading Company. By 1942, he was its International Director, undertaking frequent trips to Germany, France and Hungary.

During this time, Wallenberg witnessed first-hand the behaviour of the Nazi regime and the atrocities befalling the Hungarian Jews, painfully aware of his own 1/16th Jewish ancestry. When US President Franklin D Roosevelt created the War Refuge Board to deal with the humanitarian crisis, they began searching for someone who could oversee a rescue mission for the trapped Jews. By June 1944, they had chosen Wallenberg to organise the program – with his intimate knowledge of the area, business contacts and excellent language skills, he was the perfect man for the job. 'Protective passports' (Schutz-Pass) were secretly developed and issued to those Jews most at risk, declaring them to be Swedish, thereby avoiding deportation and the wearing of yellow stars. Safe houses were rented throughout Budapest. Wallenberg had organised and executed an audacious plan that saved up to 100,000 Jewish lives, but it also painted a target on his back.

"Wallenberg's plan had saved up to 100,000 Jewish lives... but it also painted a target on his back"

Wallenberg continually changed locations to avoid apprehension but eventually he was tracked down. On 17 January 1945, he was called to the Soviet's Deputy Commissar for Defence. He was never officially seen again, although it's known that he was transferred to Lubyanka Prison, cell 123.

Various people claimed to have seen him or heard his voice from behind closed doors, but the evidence is little more than hearsay. The Soviet-controlled Hungarian radio declared that he had been murdered in 1945, while, in 1957, the Soviet government claimed that he had died of natural causes in his cell back in 1947. An investigation carried out in 1991 concluded that Wallenberg had been poisoned while under lock and key in the infamous Lubyanka. Contradictory testimony said he had been shot.

Following Stalin's death in 1953, thousands of prisoners-of-war were released, and witness accounts surfaced, describing encounters with Wallenberg in Moscow prisons; a number of former prisoners have claimed to have seen him long after his supposed death. Talk of a Swedish diplomat living within the walls of a Soviet prison still persist. Two independent witnesses reported seeing him behind bars as recently as 1987.

In October 2016, Raoul Wallenberg was finally declared dead. The Swedish tax agency recorded the date of his passing as 31 July 1952. It's as good a date as any, but whether it's correct... who knows?

Wallenberg's half-sister, Nina Lagergren, holds a photograph of her beloved brother

Image Source: Getty Images.

Did Wallenberg end his days locked away behind one of these steel cell doors at Lubyanka Prison?

KASPAR HAUSER: MYSTERY BOY

Kaspar Hauser appeared from nowhere and died a violent death; to this death, his true identity remains a mystery

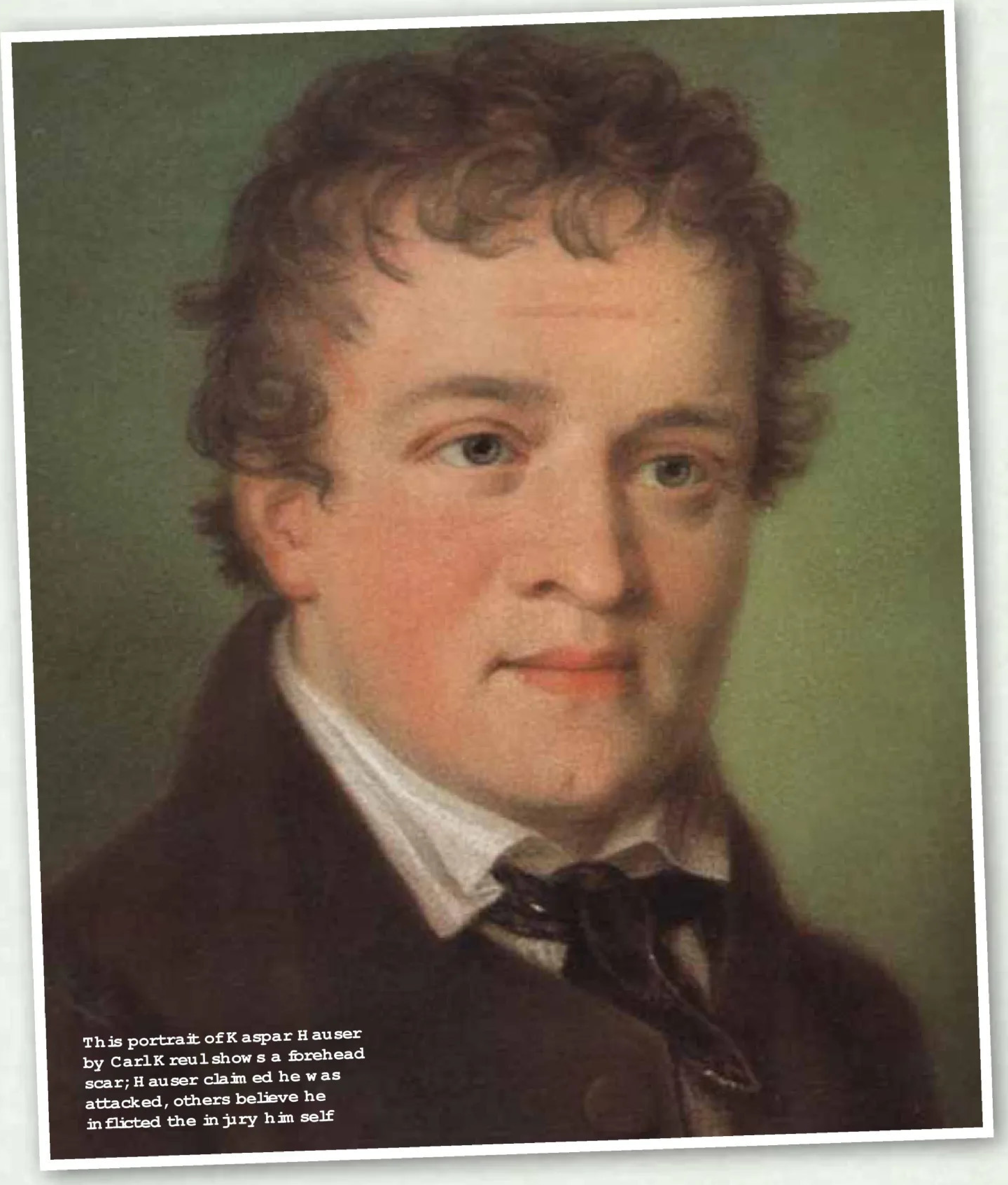
WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

On 26 May 1828, a teenaged boy wandered through the streets of Nuremberg, clutching a letter written by an unknown hand. The shocking note revealed that the boy had been raised in secrecy for 16 years, never having stepped outside his keeper's home in all that time. It explained that he wished to join the cavalry like his late father and asked that he either be taken in or left to hang.

Physically healthy but mostly uneducated, the boy appeared to know little language but could write two words: Kaspar Hauser. As the weeks passed, he began to write more and penned a description of a life spent alone in a meagre cell. He never saw the man who cared for him and would wake to find simple food and what appeared to be drugged water left for him, or his straw bedding changed and his hair and nails clipped and tidy. Immediately before he was taken to Nuremberg, a man with a concealed face visited his cell and taught him to write his name.

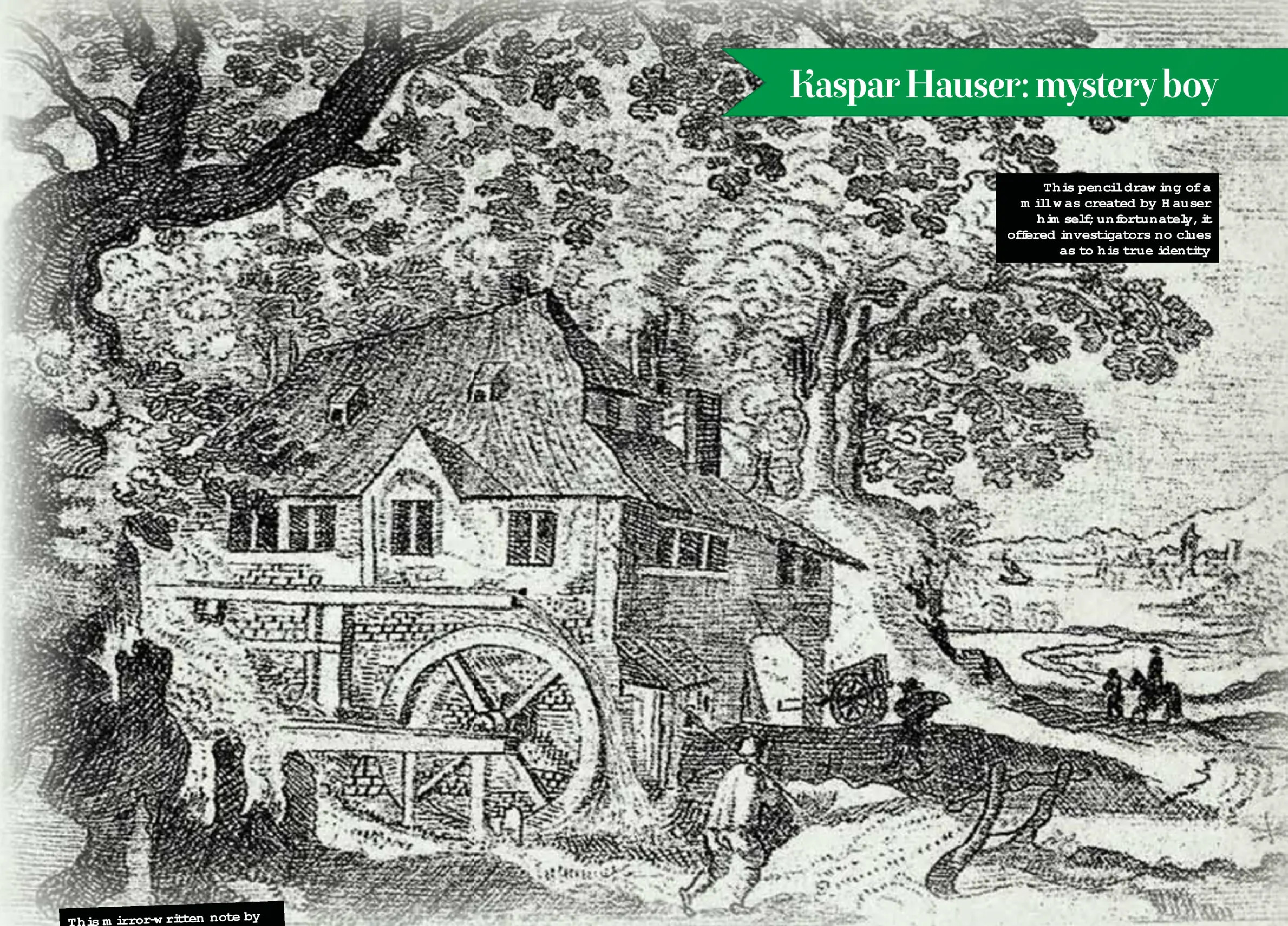
Kaspar Hauser became a celebrity and Nuremberg adopted him as its own. As officials sought an explanation for their mysterious new charge, conspiracy theories and claims of a hoax abounded. Some believed he was a fraud, others that he was an heir to the ducal House of Baden,

"The boy appeared to know little language but could write two words: Kaspar Hauser"

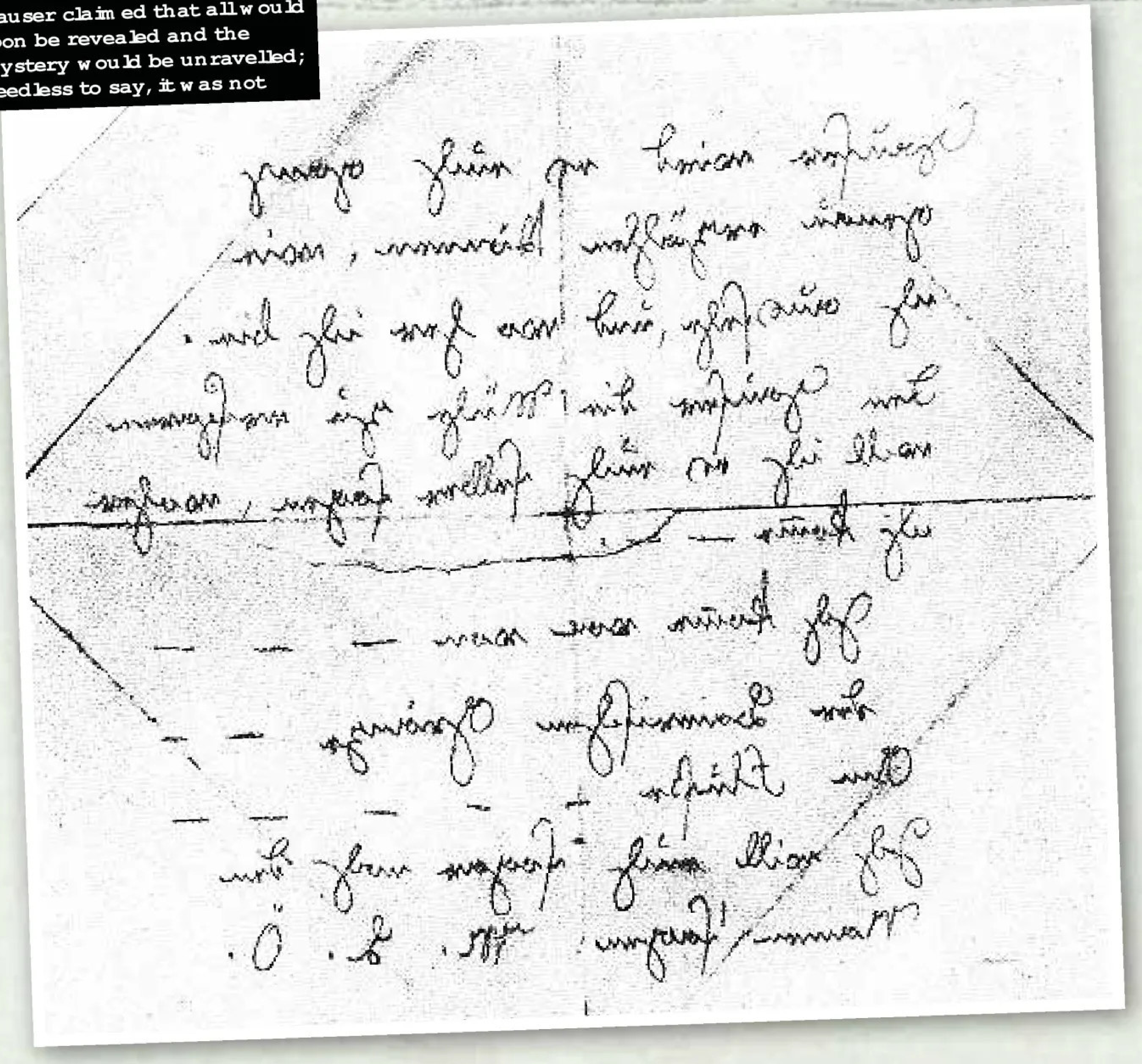


This portrait of Kaspar Hauser by Carl Kreul shows a forehead scar; Hauser claimed he was attacked, others believe he inflicted the injury himself

Kaspar Hauser: mystery boy



This pencil drawing of a mill was created by Hauser himself; unfortunately, it offered investigators no clues as to his true identity



This mirror-written note by Hauser claimed that all would soon be revealed and the mystery would be unravelled; needless to say, it was not

who had been locked away like the Man in the Iron Mask. The mystery only deepened when Hauser was attacked; he claimed that his assailant had been his mysterious masked keeper. This time, people were not so understanding; Hauser had begun to acquire a reputation for lying to those who were caring for him, and they suspected that he had injured himself.

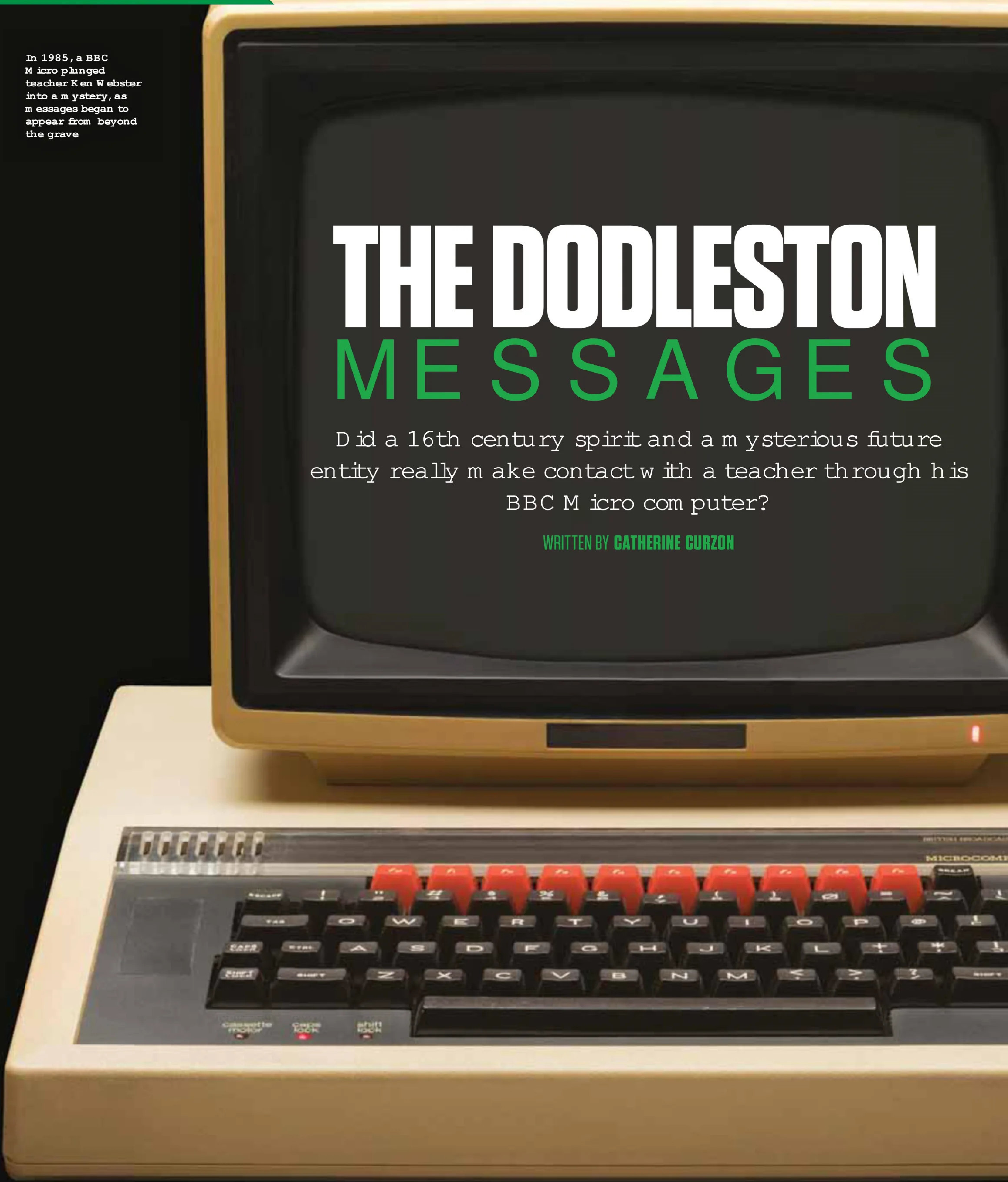
Eventually Hauser was taken in by Lord Stanhope, a British noble who took the boy to Hungary in an attempt to see if he recognised the place. When his efforts were fruitless, Stanhope established his charge in Ansbach, suspicious that he had been deceived. Once again, in Ansbach Hauser's acquaintances found his temper and manner off-putting and came to suspect that he had fabricated the whole story.

On 14 December 1833, Hauser came home with a stab wound in his chest. He claimed that a stranger had handed him a note, then attacked him. Though many suspected that the wound was self-inflicted, it was to prove fatal. Hauser died of his wounds just three days later. To this day, his true identity – whether duke or deceiver - remains a mystery.

THE DODLESTON
MESSAGES

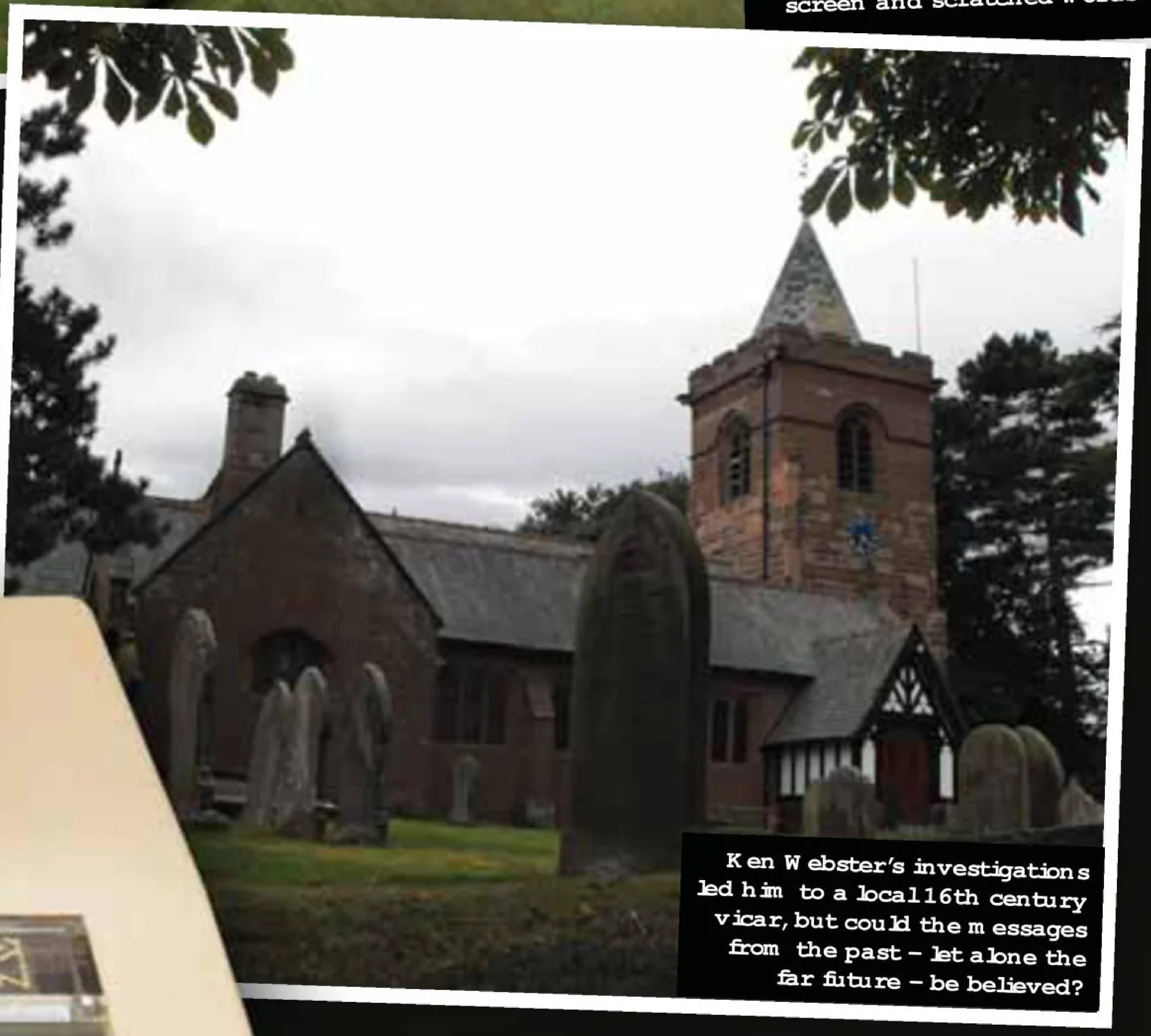
Did a 16th century spirit and a mysterious future entity really make contact with a teacher through his BBC Micro computer?

WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**



In 1985, a BBC Micro plunged teacher Ken Webster into a mystery, as messages began to appear from beyond the grave

Dodleston village became the unlikely epicentre of paranormal activity, and ghosts of the past and future made contact via a computer screen and scratched words



Ken Webster's investigations led him to a local 16th century vicar, but could the messages from the past – let alone the far future – be believed?

"This new character suggested that Ken and his girlfriend were the subjects of a mysterious experiment and told them not to meddle"

The Dodleston Messages

In 1985, teacher Ken Webster's renovation project on 18th century Meadow Cottage in Dodleston was disturbed by some very strange occurrences indeed. Six-toed footprints appeared on the walls of his bathroom and cans of cat food magically stacked themselves into pyramids. Believing he was the subject of a prank, Ken put the tins away, painted out the footprints and went back to work.

Ken borrowed a BBC computer from the school where he worked and soon after he brought it home, a poem appeared on the screen of the computer, followed a few days later by a message that appeared to be written in archaic English, and accused Ken of stealing the house. For the next 18 months, Ken Webster's computer lit up with messages from what seemed to be the ghost of one of the cottage's previous inhabitants.

Determined to find out who his correspondent was, Ken asked questions of the entity and it replied with information about the era it had inhabited, as well as making observations on Ken's own era. The author of the messages referred to themselves as Lukas, and as the dramatic messages increased, he was arrested for using the "light box" in his own era. It was then revealed that he was actually a vicar named Thomas Harden, whose messages were being interfered with by future beings.

If that wasn't strange enough, as messages from Thomas began to appear scratched onto surfaces in the cottage, those on the computer took on a different tone as a third party weighed in from the year 2109. This new character suggested that Ken and his girlfriend were the subjects of a mysterious experiment and told them not to meddle. Whatever the truth, despite Ken's best efforts to decipher the source of the messages, they eventually ended and the computer fell silent again.

Ken Webster told the story of the BBC Micro messages in his own book, citing evidence that the messages were written in a language and style inherent to the 1500s. Researchers, however, have pointed out multiple mistakes and inconsistencies in the messages that would suggest they were written not by someone in the sixteenth century, but by someone aping that style of writing. So was Ken Webster the victim – or perpetrator – of a prank, or did he really stand at the centre of messages from the past and the future? Both Thomas and 2109 promised that a book would be found that would reveal all but, 40 years on, that book remains frustratingly undiscovered.

Images source: Alamy

THE DANCING PLAGUE

A curious affliction swept through mainland Europe during the late Middle Ages that would continue to perplex scientists and historians alike, for centuries to come…

WRITTEN BY **ALICE PATTILLO**

A late 16th century illustration of the victims of the hysterical dance mania by Hendrik Hondius I, based upon the earlier work of Pieter Brueghel

On a sweltering June summer day of 1518 in the city of Strasbourg, Alsace – in what is now modern day France but was, at the time, part of the Holy Roman Empire – a single woman took to the street and began to dance. With no music playing and displaying not an ounce of joy while participating in what would normally be considered a congenial act, it appeared that this lady wasn't merely getting frisky. The poor woman was compelled to move by some seemingly supernatural force, and she was unable to stop until she collapsed from sheer exhaustion, only to arise once again after a few hours shut-eye and reassume her cavorting. Unsurprisingly, she quickly attracted quite the crowd, with many debating whether or not the spectacle was indeed out of her control or simply the woman putting on a performance at the expense of her husband – with whom she'd allegedly had a disagreement with prior to her dancing demonstration – while he pleaded for her to desist.

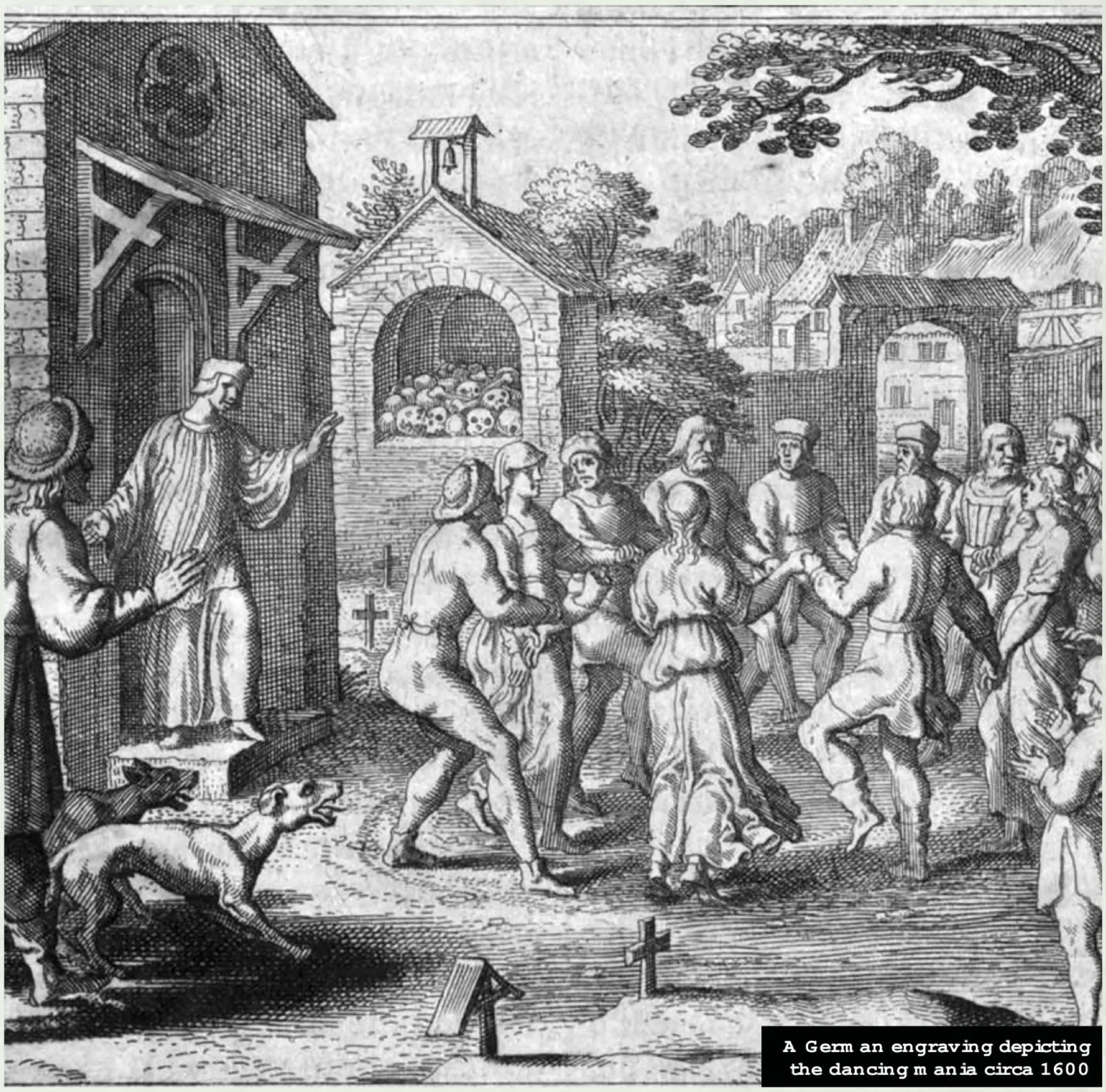
However, by day three, any doubts that the woman – reputedly named Lady, or Frau, Troffea – wasn't inflicted by a remorseless compulsion were quelled and many were convinced she had been cursed or that her violent contortions were a sure sign she had been possessed by a demon. Her danse macabre continued for four to six days, by which time Troffea was trapped in a trance-like state, soaked in sweat, her feet bloody and bruised, and in visible pain and anguish when she was carted off to a shrine in honour of St Vitus, the patron saint of dancing, in a desperate attempt to purge her devilish urges. At this point, the general consensus was that the 'curse' was a moral message from God rather than anything sent by the devil.

While Troffea's pilgrimage had resulted in her ordeal finally ceasing – whether her visit to St Vitus' was a coincidence or a cure we shall never know – it hadn't stopped the condition from spreading and soon the onlookers that she'd attracted thanks to her strange affliction had caught the sickness themselves, with 50 more people joining in with this incessant dancing. And numbers only continued to rise over the next couple of months, with some accounts indicating that numbers reached up to 400. These troupes of unfortunate souls were left lost in compulsive convulsions, barely able to eat, drink or take rest, no matter the amount of pain they were in, and the dancing plague quickly turned deadly. People were literally dancing themselves to death – up to 15 people per day were struck down with a fatal case of dancing sickness. Those who didn't perish weren't much luckier either. At the very least, they were collapsing, falling into unconsciousness and never fully recovering from their uncontrollable romp. The horror of this peculiar infliction was expressed in numerous chronicles of the time and even inspired a contemporary poem, published in one of them:

> *"Many hundreds in Strassburg [sic] began,*
> *To dance and hop, women and men,*
> *In the public market, in alleys and streets,*
> *Day and night; and many of them ate nothing*
> *Until at last the sickness left them.*
> *This affliction was called St Vitus' dance"*

Those affected were tied onto wagons and hurried off to St Vitus of Hohlenstein, only returning after the demise of their dancing. But after around three months of the unruly dance craze, it ceased by the end of August just as quickly as it had started.

It would be logical to brush the bizarre occurrence off as a singular bout of mass hysteria or a conspiratorial demonstrative plot, but this wasn't an isolated incident, it had happened before, and would happen again.


A German engraving depicting the dancing mania circa 1600

DANCE FEVER

The earliest recorded 'dancing plague' dates back to the 7th century, and there had been at least seven bouts of it in Europe prior to the 1518 Strasbourg outbreak. There are stories of dancing madness occurring in 1017 in Kölbigk, Saxony – although these may merely have been fables. However, another tale in the 1020s in Bernburg, also Saxony, suggests that perhaps there were shades of truth. There, the affliction took hold around Christmas time, when 18 peasants began dancing and notably – distinguishing it from other outbreaks – singing around church and disrupted the mass. In 1247, it was reported to have arisen in Erfurt, where children danced and hopped the town's gates, later collapsing and being discovered by their distraught parents. Some were dead, others suffered tremors and fatigue that would last the rest of their lives. In 1278, the affliction could be found in Maastricht (the Netherlands), when 200 people danced on a bridge over the River Moselle until it collapsed, hurling the dancers to their deaths. From 1373-74, the dreaded dance erupted once again in Swabia (now Germany), the Netherlands and even England, quickly spreading

La Petite Alsace
Maison des

The medieval city of Strasbourg hosted the most infamous outbreak of choreomania

> "Those afflicted danced from place to place screaming with pain, leaping, running and begging for God"

like a contagion into Belgium (Hainaut, Flanders and Brabant). It continued to claim the aching bodies of much of the Holy Roman Empire, spanning from Aachen in Germany throughout the Rhineland and into France (including a minor bout in Strasbourg for seemingly the first time), reaching as far as Italy and Luxembourg in the summer of 1374. Those afflicted danced from place to place screaming with pain, leaping, running and begging for God to have mercy on their souls. For most, the curse wore off after two weeks and they regained control of their bodies. For others, they would succumb to the mania again, relapsing one or two more times. In 1375, it returned to France, Germany and the Netherlands yet again and in 1381, it was found in the German city of Augsburg. By 1428, the plague had spread to a group of women in Zurich in Switzerland and claimed the life of a monk in Schaffhausen. After the significant outbreak in Strasbourg in 1518, the dancing plague reached its peak. In 1536, a group of Swiss children were struck with the mania in Basel, and in 1551 the plague infected a sole male in Anhalt, Germany. In the 1560s, Dutch artist Pieter Brueghel illustrated a group of women near Molenbeek in Belgium, who appeared to have caught the dancing bug and were being dragged on a pilgrimage to help cure the affliction on St John's Day. During the early 17th century, there were reports of women who were annually compelled into a mad dance until they collapsed at the chapel of St Vitus in Drefelhausen around the day of the saint, but by the mid 1600s the phenomenon had completely died out.

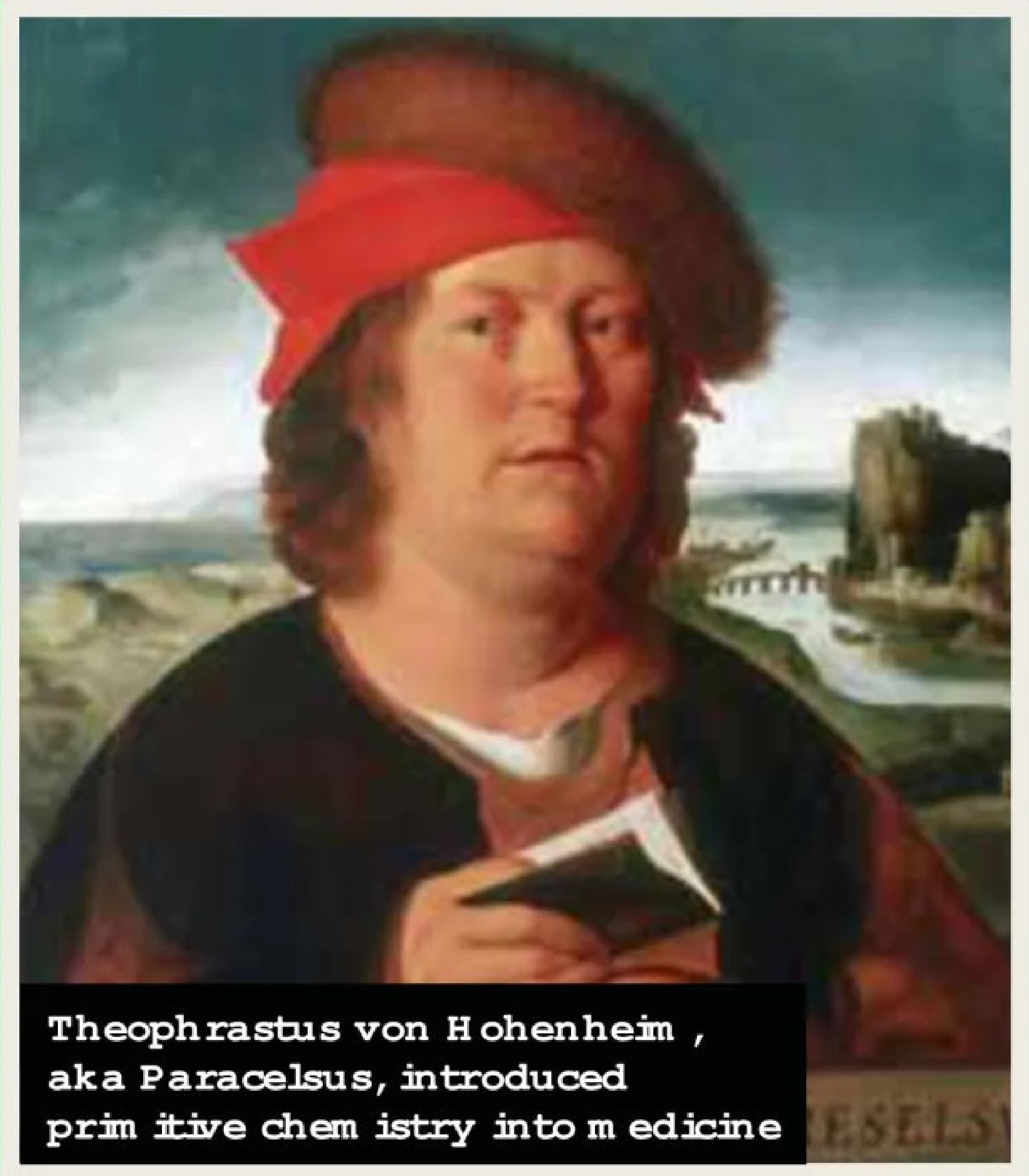
MAKING A SONG AND DANCE OF IT

The dancing plague was referred to as the rather medical sounding choreomania, taken from the Greek terms for dance and madness: choros + mania (meaning madness).

Initially, choreomania was believed to be a curse sent by either St John the Baptist or St Vitus, earning it the names St Vitus' Dance or St John's Dance. Early outbreaks were interpreted as divine punishment or demonic possession, often treating the affected parties with religious

BAD BLOOD?

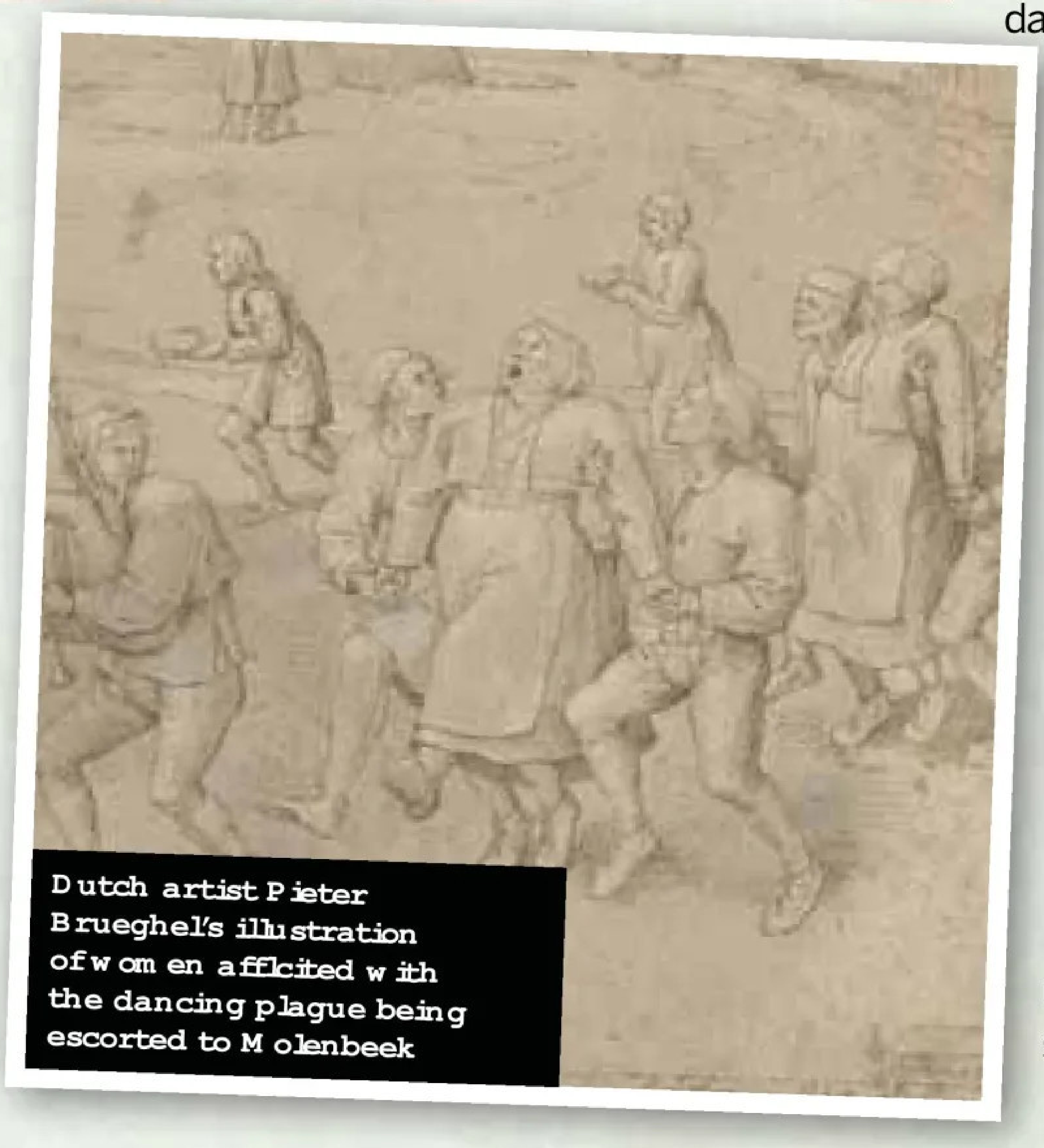
While religious treatments were the go-to cures, Paracelsus suggested that it wasn't just a sickness of the soul that caused choreomania, it had something to do with the body too. He suggested that it was due to an imbalance of the "body humours", an arcane concept that the body was made up of four elements: phlegm, yellow bile, black bile and blood. Choreomania, he believed, concerned the blood – specifically, burning or overheating blood, and it should be cured if the dancers burned themselves out. Paracelsus, a true product of his time, may have had a more scientific argument for the causation of choreomania, but it was still deeply rooted in the tension between Renaissance thought and religion, misogyny and questionable medieval medicine. He noted that those most commonly afflicted with the plague were "whores and scoundrels" who were prone to sin and reckless living, which could cause such an affliction but not by an act of God. He suggested shutting the sufferers in the dark, without mercy, water or bread and enforcing abstinence upon them. This, he said, would induce melancholy and cure them – or simply chuck them into freezing water.



Theophrastus von Hohenheim, aka Paracelsus, introduced primitive chemistry into medicine

ceremonies such as reciting incantations and prayers, immersing them in holy water and even performing exorcisms. Other treatments included the playing of music, which was believed to help drive out the compulsion, but often just encouraged others to join in.

Strasbourg has become perhaps the most famous breakout of choreomania, thanks to detailed accounts of the event being recorded at the time in the form of chronicles and manuscripts stored by civil authorities, as well as municipal orders relating to the epidemic, sermons and physicians' notes. But by far the most detailed (if not biased) accounts of the dancing plague are thanks to Swiss Renaissance alchemist and physician Theophrastus von Honhenheim, most commonly known as Paracelsus. He referred to the plague as chorealasciva and its victims as choreomaniacs, and visited Strasbourg just seven years after the dreaded dancing had taken place, writing extensively about it and sharing his theories on its causes in a series of medical treatises.



Dutch artist Pieter Brueghel's illustration of women afflicted with the dancing plague being escorted to Molenbeek

MIND OVER MATTER

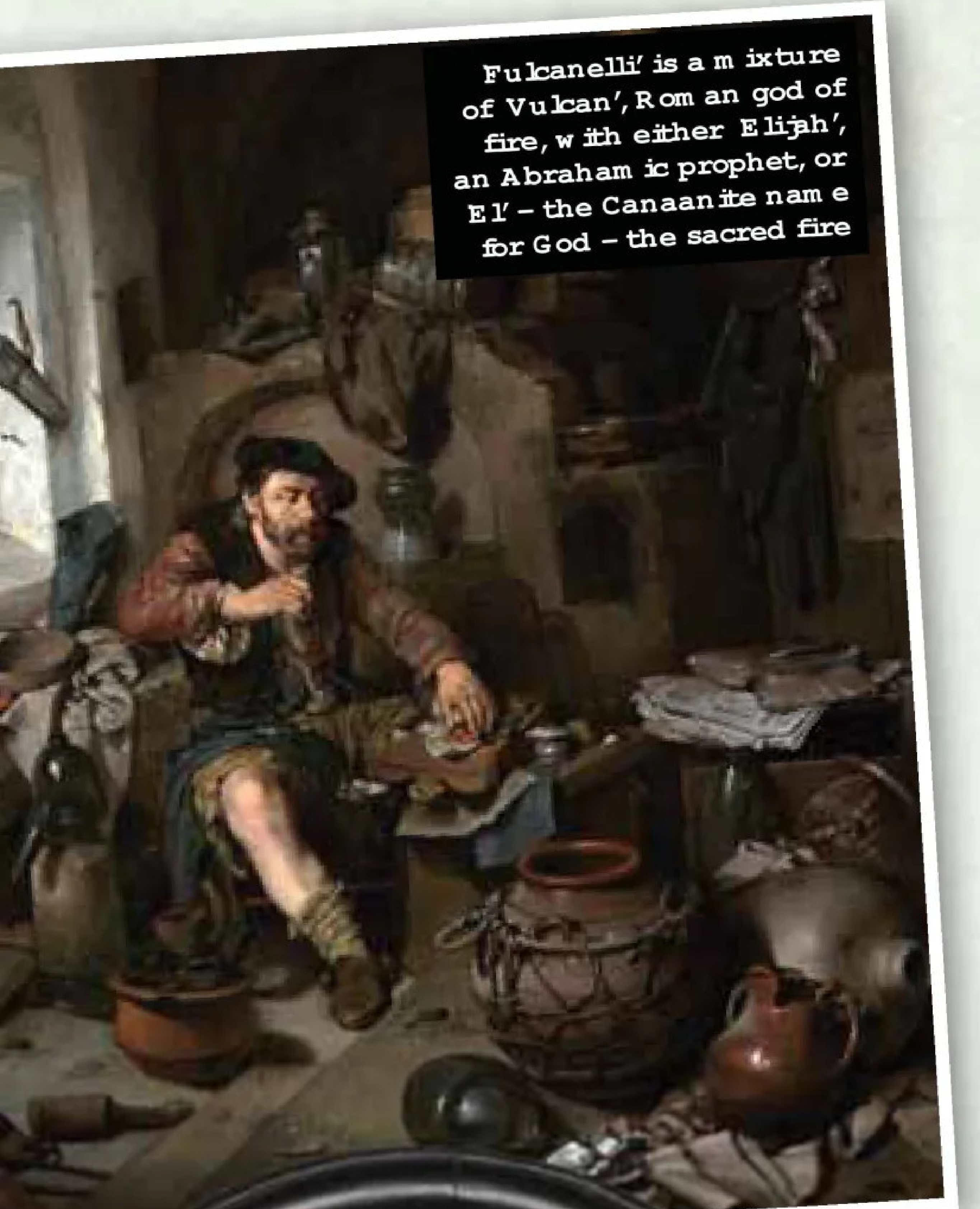
Modern theories for the causation and cures of such a peculiar epidemic rest chiefly on the idea of mass hysteria and that it might simply have all been in their heads.

Maybe the dancing plague was an extreme reaction to trauma. Many of these plagues seemed to be just the tip of the iceberg for towns and cities that had been rife with calamity and civil unrest for years. Strasbourg had suffered floods, extreme drops in temperature, bubonic plague, apocalyptic omens – such as the 1492 comet – and peasant revolts. Failed harvests and famine had led up to an unusually hot summer in 1518. Many of those who partook in the manic dance suffered exhaustion before they'd even begun their frenzy. They were often living in poverty and suffering from what we can only imagine was extreme stress, and were caught in between the superstitions and religion of medieval Europe, and the rise of the new early modern Renaissance era. As such, numerous modern theorists believe the mania was a result of a shared stress. A psychic epidemic stemmed from their extreme beliefs regarding the devil, curses, angry spirits and divine punishment. Many behavioural and delusional disorders have been proven to exist, such as koro – also known as shrinking penis – as well as culture-bound behavioural syndromes. Perhaps those who witnessed others in the throngs of the plague simply imagined symptoms of their own. Others have suggested more conspiratorial explanations, such as that they were all staged occult rituals, and more still blame ergot poisoning or known medical conditions such as encephalitis or epilepsy, but these cannot account for all of the characteristics and were mostly conditions already known to the population. Whatever the cause of the dancing plagues, it remains a bizarre enigma that defies belief.

Images source: Getty, Alamy

The frontispiece of Fulcanelli's most important work, *Les Mystère des Cathédrales*, with an introduction by his assistant, Canseliet, and illustrated by Julien Champagne

Mutus Liber
Lege, lege, relege, ora, labora et invenies
1910.
J. Champagne
Omnia · ab · uno · et · in · unum · omnia

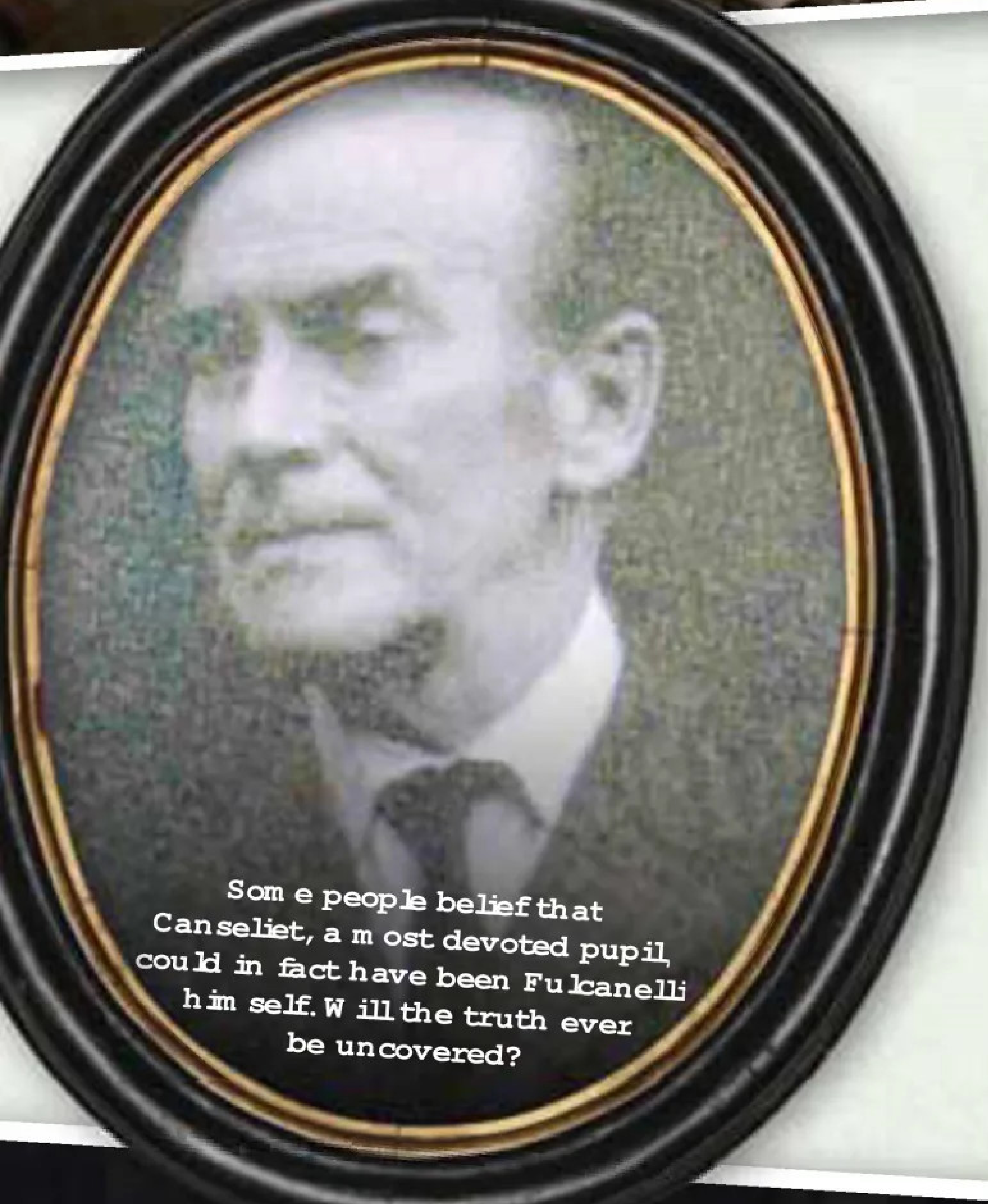


Fulcanelli' is a mixture of Vulcan', Roman god of fire, with either Elijah', an Abrahamic prophet, or El' – the Canaanite name for God – the sacred fire

FULCANELLI

While little is known about the mysterious esoteric author, either a man or legend, the craze for this modern-day alchemist has become a cultural phenomenon

WRITTEN BY **DEE DEE CHAINEY**



Some people belief that Canseliet, a most devoted pupil, could in fact have been Fulcanelli himself. Will the truth ever be uncovered?

Like so many legendary historical figures, Fulcanelli's real identity is shrouded in mystery. It is likely that he was French, and some claim he was born in the first half of the 19th century, in 1839. His works can unquestionably be attributed to someone well versed in alchemy. His most elaborate claim to success is that his assistant, Eugène Canseliet, transformed lead into gold in the presence of witnesses, attaining the alchemist's dream. Fulcanelli is said to have disappeared in the 1920s after imparting his knowledge to his assistants. Some say he survived World War II, only to disappear after the Liberation of Paris in 1944. Canseliet claimed that his master appeared to him a final time in Seville in 1953, asking, "Do you recognise me?" He reports in his writings that the man appeared 20 years younger than the last time he'd seen him, yet would have been over 100 at this stage, meaning he was thought to have finally discovered the secret of immortality.

Many theories unveiling his true face have been put forward: from an array of French occultists, to a member of the former French royal family, to the Count of Saint-Germain – an 18th century alchemist also thought to have gained immortality. Some suggest that Canseliet may have been the man himself, or even his illustrator, Jean-Julien Hubert Champagne, himself an occultist. Others suggest that Fulcanelli is the pen name of a collective: the Frères d'Heliopolis, including Canseliet, Champagne, and either the occultist and Freemason, Jules Boucher, or Pierre Dujols, a librarian from Paris.

His two existing books – published after his disappearance in the 1920s – were *Le Mystère des Cathédrales*, and *Les Demeures Philosophales*. Both attempt to uncover the alchemical symbolism of important monuments like Notre-Dame Cathedral, and comment on the scientific and alchemical knowledge of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Arcane and full of Greek and Latin puns, it is obvious that the books intended to exclude anyone without a firm grounding in alchemy.

Fulcanelli is alleged to have appeared in Paris in 1937 to warn an acquaintance about the dangers of nuclear weaponry

They were initially published in a small print run of 300, yet the works gained popularity after their reprinting in the 1950s and 60s. Soon, the esoteric craze around the mysterious disappearing alchemist began.

Notes for a third book were rumoured, *Finis Gloriae Mundi* – entrusted, once more, to Canseliet; apparently Fulcanelli decided that the time was never right for publication.

Another title of the same name, published by Jean-Marc Savary in 1999, and signed 'Fulcanelli', was widely believed to be a counterfeit.

According to supposed quotes from the man himself, Fulcanelli understood the Great Work of alchemy

Images source: Getty, Wiki

THE GREEN CHILDREN OF WOOLPIT

The narrative of two strange siblings who inextricably appeared in a trapping pit in medieval England has bewildered the nation for centuries

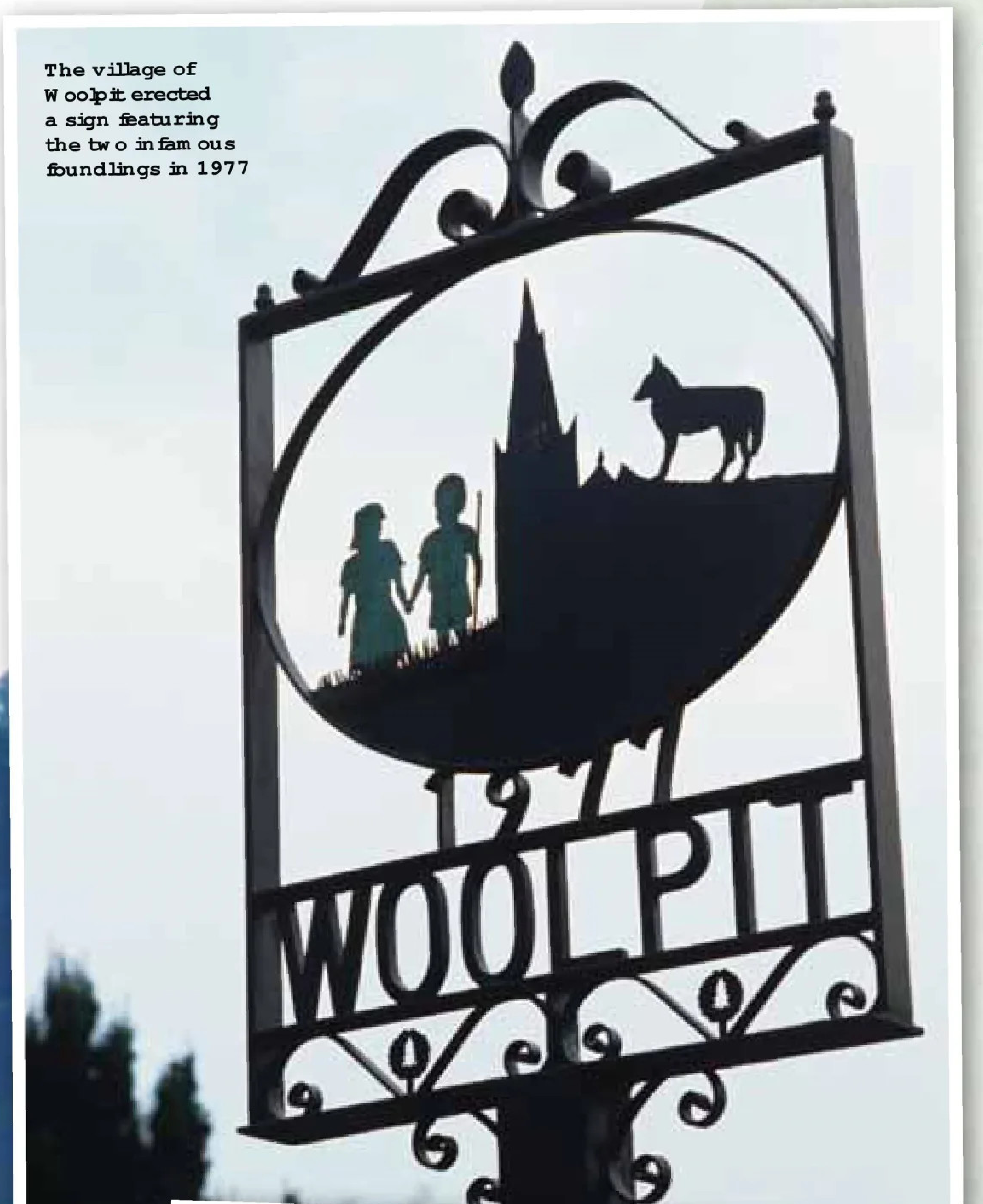
WRITTEN BY **ALICE PATTILLO**

It might sound like the plot to some obscure 1960s Disney film, but the tale of the green children of Woolpit is supposedly a real life mystery that dates back to the 12th century. As with most things medieval, the facts of the story are shady, but perhaps that simply adds to the allure of this 800 year old narrative.

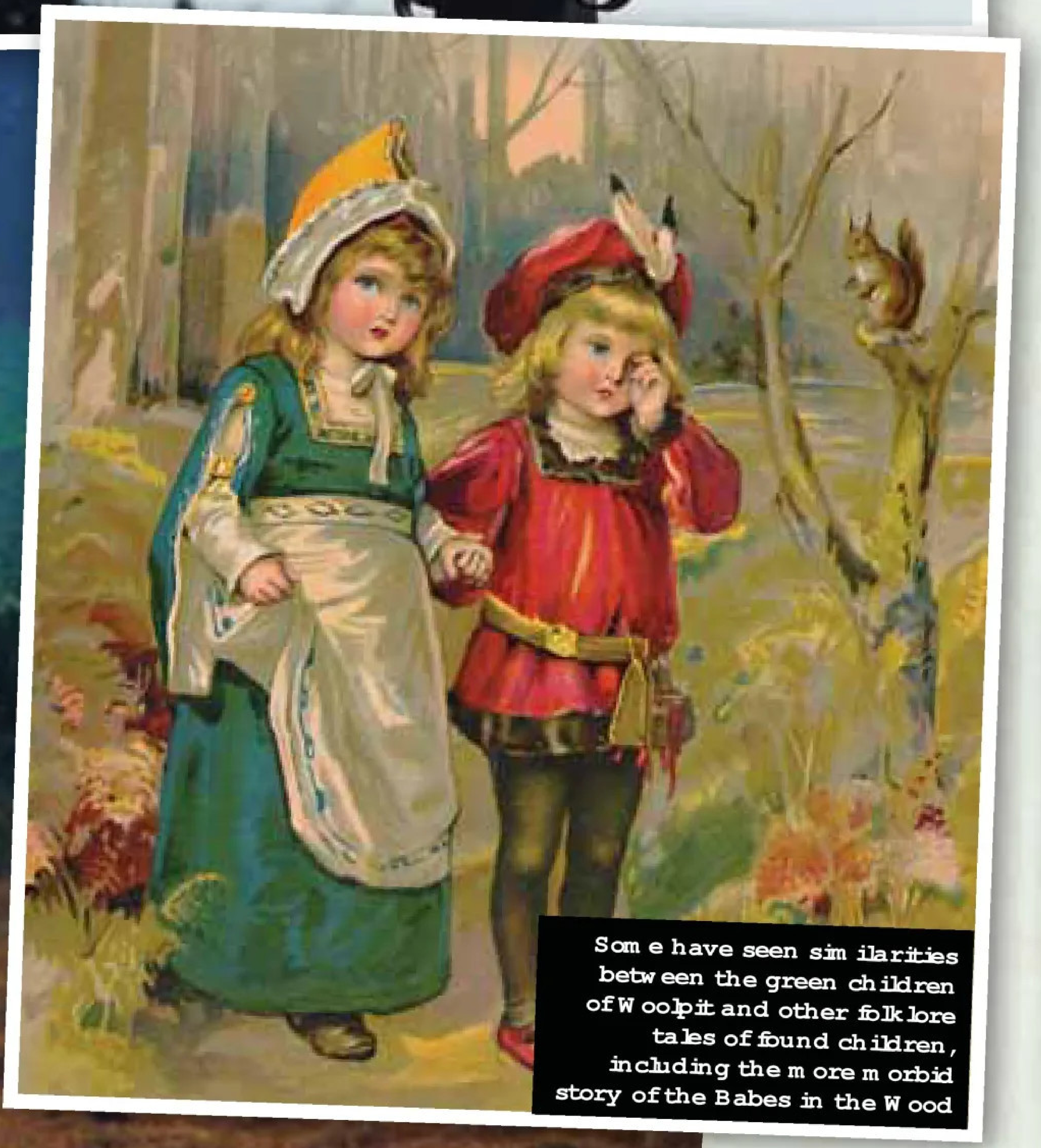
Located in Suffolk, East Anglia, on the Southeastern coast of England, Woolpit derives its name from its nearby wolf pits – large holes dug in the ground, filled with carrion and covered by branches in order to trap wild wolves who may be encroaching on nearby farmland. Sometime during the mid-12th century, villagers bringing in the harvest discovered two children – presumed to be a brother and sister – huddled together in the woods beside one of the trapping pits that gave the village its name. But these were no ordinary children. The duo had alien-like green skin, appeared to be undernourished, spoke a language of unknown origin and wore peculiar clothing fashioned out of fabrics unlike anything anyone had seen before. If that isn't bizarre enough, according to contemporary reports, the youngsters refused ►

Woolpit was a heavily populated village during the Middle Ages but its legacy lies with legend of the green children

Images source: Alamy



The village of Woolpit erected a sign featuring the two infamous foundlings in 1977



Some have seen similarities between the green children of Woolpit and other folklore tales of found children, including the more morbid story of the Babes in the Wood

food for days until they were offered fresh bean stalks, and they devoured the raw broad beans inside, living off them for some time. Gradually the children adapted to life in Woolpit, slowly accepting normal foods, and eventually lost their green tinge. Supposedly the boy was sickly and died young – in some retellings he doesn't make it long past the children's survival. The girl however, perceived to be the elder of the two, went on to live a long life and later described her life before encountering the villagers of Woolpit. She told her adoptive family that she and her brother had come from a place called St Martin's Land where the sun didn't shine and they lived in perpetual twilight. When herding their father's cattle one day, they heard the sound of bells – generally understood to be the sound of nearby Bury St Edmunds cathedral – and followed the sound into a cave, later emerging from one of the wolf pits by which they were found.

Whether or not the story is true, a hoax or merely a fictitious fable remains a mystery to this day, and many theories have emerged attempting to explain the bizarre tale, ranging from the paranormal to the mundane. Some of the most popular hypotheses include that the children were faeries or aliens, or perhaps – less fantastically – the children of Flemish immigrants who were suffering from "green sickness", a form of anaemia. Whether or not the legend is folklore or based in reality, it's a mystery that has puzzled many for the best part of a millenia and will surely continue for generations to come.

> "Whether or not the story is true, a hoax or merely a fictitious fable remains a mystery to this day"

MAJESTIC MYSTERIES

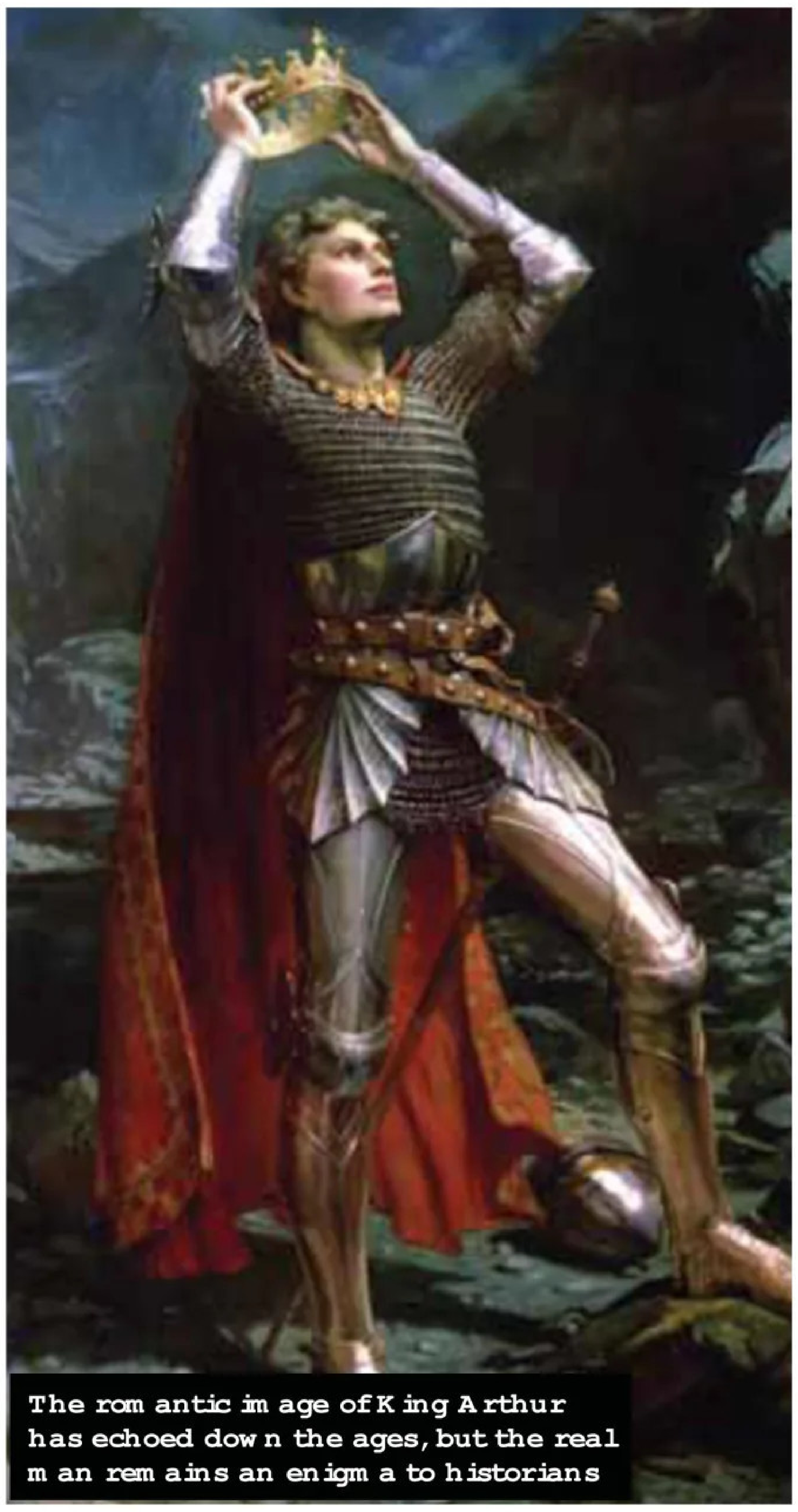
Even the mightiest monarchs and noble aristocrats can have stories that are shrouded in mystery

WRITTEN BY **BEN GAZUR**

Kings, queens, and the nobility have always lived their lives in public. Their every move was – and still is – watched and often recorded by the courtiers around them. It was held a high honour to see the French king rise from bed, eat his meals, and to stand around his bed as he went to sleep. Yet, despite the attention given to them, many mysteries still surround even the most famous royals to have ever lived.

It is hard to tell whether some monarchs existed at all. Romulus, the first king of Rome, is rumoured to have disappeared in a cloud, or been torn apart by senators, or to have never existed at all. We only have the reports of those who lived at a later date. Even with modern royalty, there are things that we will never know. There is a hunger to know more about monarchs' lives because they have played a central role throughout history, but it can be impossible. Here are some of the tantalising mysteries that surround royals.

Wearing a crown has not protected monarchs and their families from mysterious events and tragically unexplained fates



The romantic image of King Arthur has echoed down the ages, but the real man remains an enigma to historians

KING ARTHUR

The paragon of kings may have saved England, but who was he?

There is no more famous king of Britain than Arthur. The tales of his wise rule, military prowess, and search for the Holy Grail were wildly popular for hundreds of years. Later kings tried to emulate him. King Edward I had a round table constructed at Winchester to recreate the noble order of Arthur's knights. King Henry VII named his oldest son Arthur. Yet, the evidence for the existence of Arthur is still debated today.

One of the earliest sources of the Arthurian legend dates from the 9th or 10th century, and mentions little other than Arthur was a warrior without peer. Most of these early texts are Welsh, but Arthur was soon adopted by English writers. Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century gives us the first narrative of Arthur that includes the wizard Merlin and describes him battling the Saxons in the age after the Roman withdrawal from Britain.

Was there a real Arthur? Was he a king, or leader of a war band? Will he wake up and save Britain in its hour of need? Time will tell.

THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER

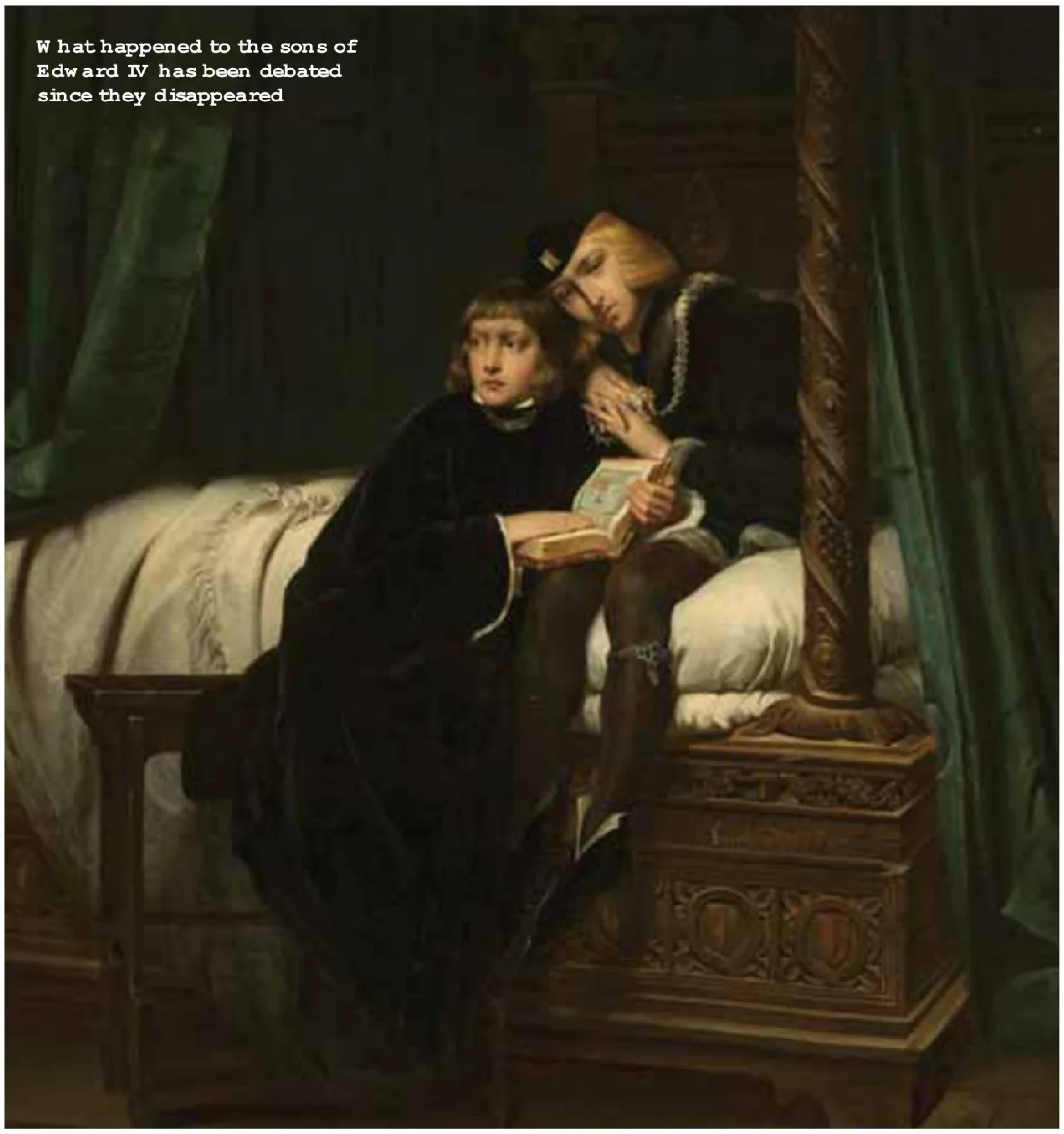
Were two princes murdered by their usurping uncle, or did they escape?

In 1483, King Edward IV of England died and left two sons: Edward and Richard. Edward was proclaimed as King Edward V and his uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, became Lord Protector of the young monarch. The boys were taken to the Tower of London in preparation for the coronation but then something strange happened – they disappeared. Nobles called for Duke Richard to take the throne. He accepted and the princes were declared to be illegitimate. They were never seen in public again and their uncle became the infamous King Richard III.

The princes are presumed to have been murdered in the Tower on the orders of their uncle, but no bodies were ever produced. It was as if they simply disappeared. Skeletons belonging to young boys have been found in the Tower, but none were conclusively proven to be the princes.

Once King Richard III was deposed by King Henry VII, several pretenders emerged who claimed to be the lost princes and tried to claim the throne. None were successful.

> "The princes are presumed to have been murdered in the Tower on the orders of their uncle"



What happened to the sons of Edward IV has been debated since they disappeared

Today, a simple cross marks the spot where Ludwig II committed suicide, or was murdered

LUDWIG II OF BAVARIA

When the king of Bavaria drowned in a shallow lake was it suicide or a political murder?

Ludwig II of Bavaria is known by many names. In Germany he is called 'the Fairy-tale King' or the 'Swan King.' To much of the world, he is known as the 'Mad King.' Ludwig was subject to a strict upbringing and was distant from his parents. Once he came into power and found huge resources at his command, he indulged his dreams of a Romantic past.

To create his own, more magical world, Ludwig began to build fanciful castles. His most famous construction was Neuschwanstein Castle, high in the mountains. The cost of his building projects began to drain the treasury. His ministers had Ludwig declared insane and moved to replace him with his uncle.

The king was detained in Neuschwanstein along with a Dr Gudden who was to care for him in his madness. On 13 June 1886, the king and Gudden took a walk beside the nearby Lake Starnberg. The two were never seen alive again.

Their bodies were found by the shore. Gudden had signs of head wounds and strangulation and Ludwig was said to have drowned, though there was no water in his lungs. His death was ruled a suicide. Many think the king was murdered to remove his awkward presence for the new ruler.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR: THE RIPPER?

Prince Albert Victor should have been king, but was he a killer?

Prince Albert Victor was the oldest son of Queen Victoria's heir, Prince Edward. In the normal course of events he would have become king of the United Kingdom, but he died of flu in 1892. During his life, he was caught up in the Cleveland Street Scandal involving a gay brothel. It was only in 1970 that someone studying the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888 suggested the true killer might have been Albert Victor. The evidence presented was circumstantial, but the idea of a mentally unstable prince murdering women has proved irresistible to some.

"He would have become king of the United Kingdom, but he died of flu in 1892"

Were the Ripper murders that shocked London performed by the heir presumptive to the British crown?

Was it possible that the daughter of Queen Victoria could have concealed a pregnancy and birth before passing off her child to others?

VICTORIA'S CHILDREN: PRINCESS LOUISE'S SECRET CHILD

Did a royal princess have an illegitimate child with her brother's tutor?

Princess Louise was considered the most attractive of Queen Victoria's daughters and rumours swirled before her marriage that she had carried out romantic affairs. In 1867, the son of Victoria's obstetrician adopted a boy they called Henry Frederick Leicester Locock. Soon after, the family moved into a grace and favour apartment in St James' Palace. As an old man, Henry told his children that he was really the child of Princess Louise and Walter Stirling, tutor of Prince Leopold. Descendents of Henry Locock have called for DNA testing to prove the connection but have thus far been rebuffed.

VICTORIA'S CHILDREN: WAS PRINCESS ALICE CURSED?

Even the charmed life of royals can be marked by tragedy.

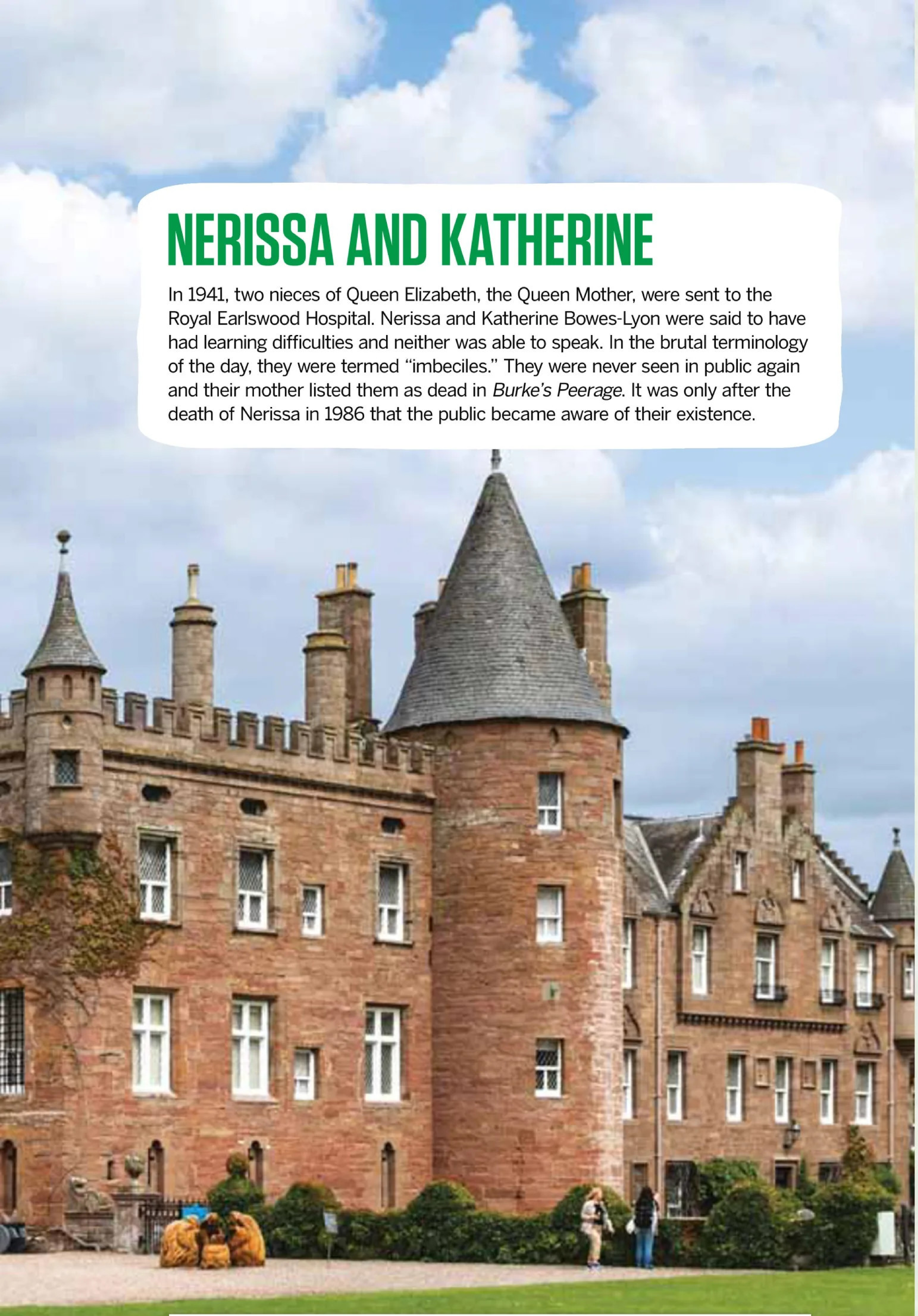
Following Prince Albert's death, Princess Alice's mother, Queen Victoria, went into deep mourning. Alice's marriage a year later was a solemn affair, more like a funeral, and her marriage was not much better. She moved to Germany and found life there hard with less money available. She had also inherited the gene for haemophilia from her mother and her son developed the disease – dying after falling from a window. When diphtheria struck her family, Alice nursed them. A daughter died and Alice succumbed soon after. Some say the tiara worn by Alice has carried a curse down to her descendents who have inherited it.

The Strawberry Leaf tiara was designed by Prince Albert – has it carried the curse of Princess Alice down the generations?

Do the walls of Glamis Castle hide the remains of a man known to history as the Monster of Glamis?

NERISSA AND KATHERINE

In 1941, two nieces of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, were sent to the Royal Earlswood Hospital. Nerissa and Katherine Bowes-Lyon were said to have had learning difficulties and neither was able to speak. In the brutal terminology of the day, they were termed “imbeciles.” They were never seen in public again and their mother listed them as dead in *Burke’s Peerage*. It was only after the death of Nerissa in 1986 that the public became aware of their existence.



THE MONSTER OF GLAMIS CASTLE

Was a deformed child locked up in the ancestral home of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother?

If you search for records of Thomas Lyon-Bowes, you will find it recorded that he was born on 21 October 1821, and he died the same day at Glamis Castle in Scotland. As a child of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, he might have been raised wealthy and beloved. Despite history saying that Thomas had died, rumours have persisted that he was actually hidden away in the castle to avoid a scandal.

Tragically, in the past disability and deformity were considered shameful. Those who were afflicted were often kept out of sight to avoid public ridicule. The midwife who delivered Thomas was said to have described the child as “half-frog, half-man.” By saying that their child died at birth, the family could avoid notoriety. Several local villagers swore that there was a secret chamber in the castle where the rightful heir to the earldom was kept in confinement. The walls of Glamis are many metres thick in places, so there is ample room for a hidden and secure room.

One of the castle’s owners is supposed to have remarked to a visitor that “if you could even guess the nature of this castle’s secret you would get down on your knees and thank God it was not yours.” An heir to the earldom is said to have preferred not to know what the castle’s secret was, so that the mystery could die out and never be retold.

Despite this, tales of the ‘Monster of Glamis’ have refused to die. Some claimed that they had heard the shrieks of the hidden heir. Others said that the chamber where the Monster was kept had been bricked up so that no one would ever find it or its occupant.

Interest in the Monster of Glamis was renewed when the daughter of the 14th Earl, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, married Prince George in 1923. When George became king in 1936, Elizabeth became the Queen of the United Kingdom and tales of locked-up relatives began to circulate again.

> “Rumours have persisted that he was actually hidden away in the castle to avoid a scandal”

WAS AMY ROBSART MURDERED?

Did a queen's favourite kill his wife in hopes of a royal marriage?

Queen Elizabeth I was well known for having favourites that she showered with gifts, yet she never married any of them. However, it was rumoured that she intended to marry Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester. Unfortunately, the earl was already married to Amy Robsart. This all changed in 1560 when Amy was found at the bottom of a set of stairs with a broken neck. Did she fall or was she pushed?

Amy had long been absent from the court and was known to be suffering from a serious illness. On the morning of her death, she sent her servants away so she might be alone. No one witnessed the fall that killed her. Many at the time suggested that Dudley had his wife murdered to clear the way for him to wed Elizabeth, though the two never married.

Some scholars think Amy may have committed suicide to end the pain of what could have been breast cancer. It's likely we will never know the truth.

The mysterious demise of the Countess of Leicester has sparked centuries of debate about what, or who, caused it

A number of people came forward claiming to be the missing Anastasia – but were any of them really her?

DID ANASTASIA SURVIVE?

In the Russian Revolution the royal family were all slaughtered – or were they?

The Russian Tsars were among the most wealthy people in the world. They held complete autocratic control of their nation, but in the revolution of 1917, they were swept from power. Tsar Nicholas II abdicated and he and his family were held captivity until Bolshevik agents murdered them all in 1918. However, there were persistent rumours that his daughter, Grand Duchess Anastasia, escaped.

Communist authorities had the royal family buried in a mineshaft and no one knew for certain that they were dead. In 1922, a woman in a Berlin mental hospital, known as Anna Anderson, announced that she was really Anastasia. Many surviving Russian nobles doubted her story, but some accepted it. Other women who claimed to be Anastasia also surfaced over the years.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the bodies of the dead royals were recovered. Tellingly, Anastasia's body was missing. Her body was finally discovered in 2007, and DNA testing confirmed that Anastasia had died in 1918.

THE MYSTERIOUS COUNT OF ST GERMAIN

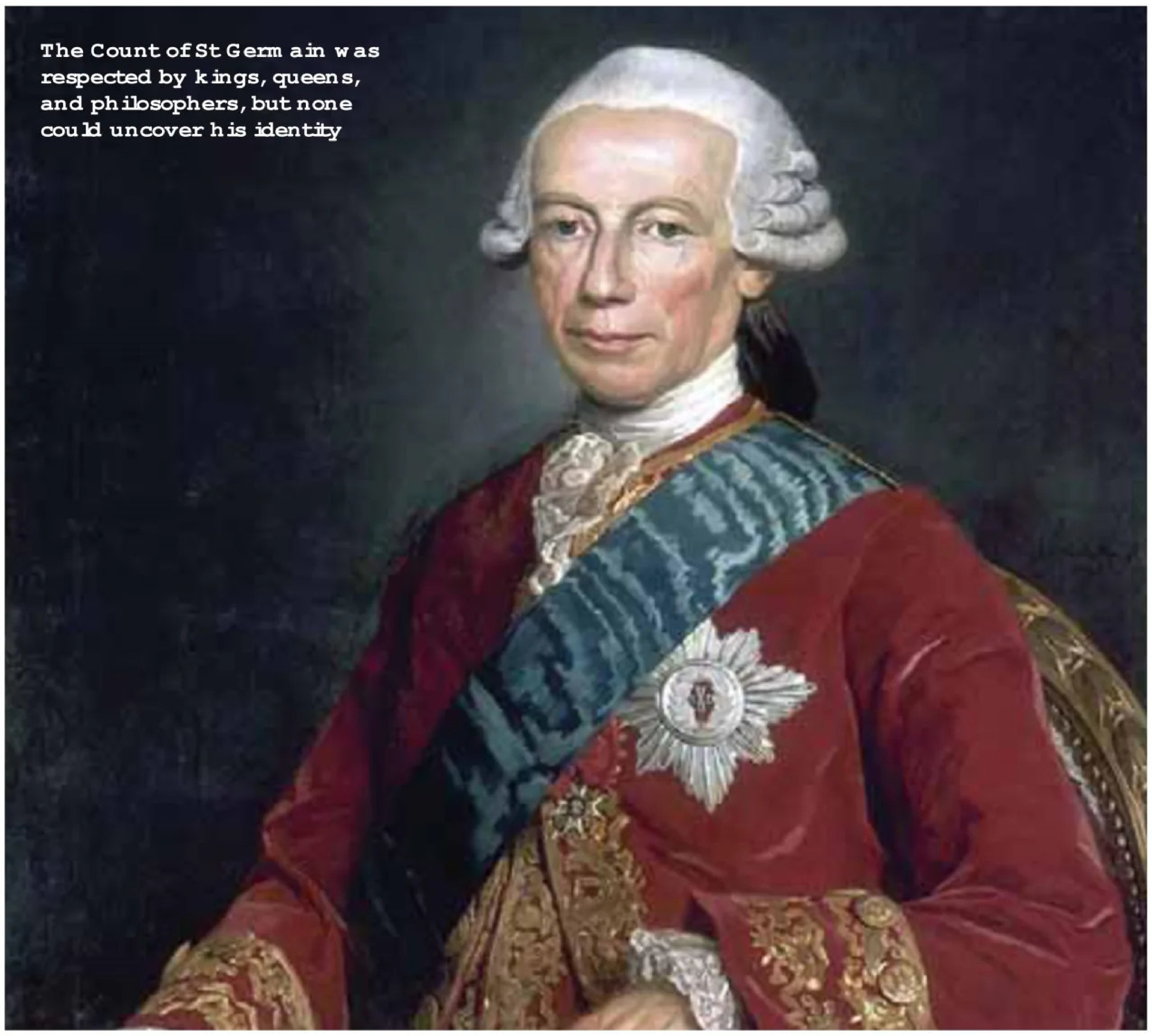
Who was this adventurer and philosopher who claimed to be immortal?

In the 1740s, a wealthy and handsome man began to make a name for himself in the courts of European royalty. He claimed that he was the Count of St Germain, though he also said he was Chevalier Schoening, the Marquis de Montferrat, Manuel Doria, and Prinz Ragoczy, among other pseudonyms.

In 1745, the count was arrested in London as he was thought to be a spy. He was released, but there were already rumours about him as he would tell no one who he really was. It was said he had a fortune in stolen gems to support himself. He spoke several languages fluently but no one could work out his mother tongue. In France, he was sent on diplomatic missions by the king. Everyone who met him was impressed. Voltaire commented, perhaps ironically, that St Germain was "the man who knows everything and who never dies." At various points, the count had joked that he was 500 years old or older.

After many adventures, the count ended up at the court in Schleswig, where the local prince set him to work in a laboratory, because the count claimed he could create new and exotic dyes and valuable gemstones. He was now claiming to be 88 years old. After five years, the Count of St Germain died and he was buried. None of his fabled wealth was discovered in his belongings and no evidence of who he truly was. But that was not the end of St Germain.

St Germain is said to have always kept a strange vial of liquid on his person, which many took to be the elixir that kept him young. Ever since his death, some have claimed that the count faked his death and still walks among us. One thing is certain, the legend of the Count of St Germain won't die.



The Count of St Germain was respected by kings, queens, and philosophers, but none could uncover his identity

PRESTER JOHN

Who was the powerful ruler of an empire in the east who offered to help Christians in Europe?

According to Christian legends, the apostle St Thomas had travelled to India to spread word of Jesus to the people there. Travel into Asia was difficult and many strange stories were told of the things that could be found there. It was only mildly surprising, therefore, when letters were received in Europe in the mid-12th century, which claimed to be from a king naming himself as Prester John.

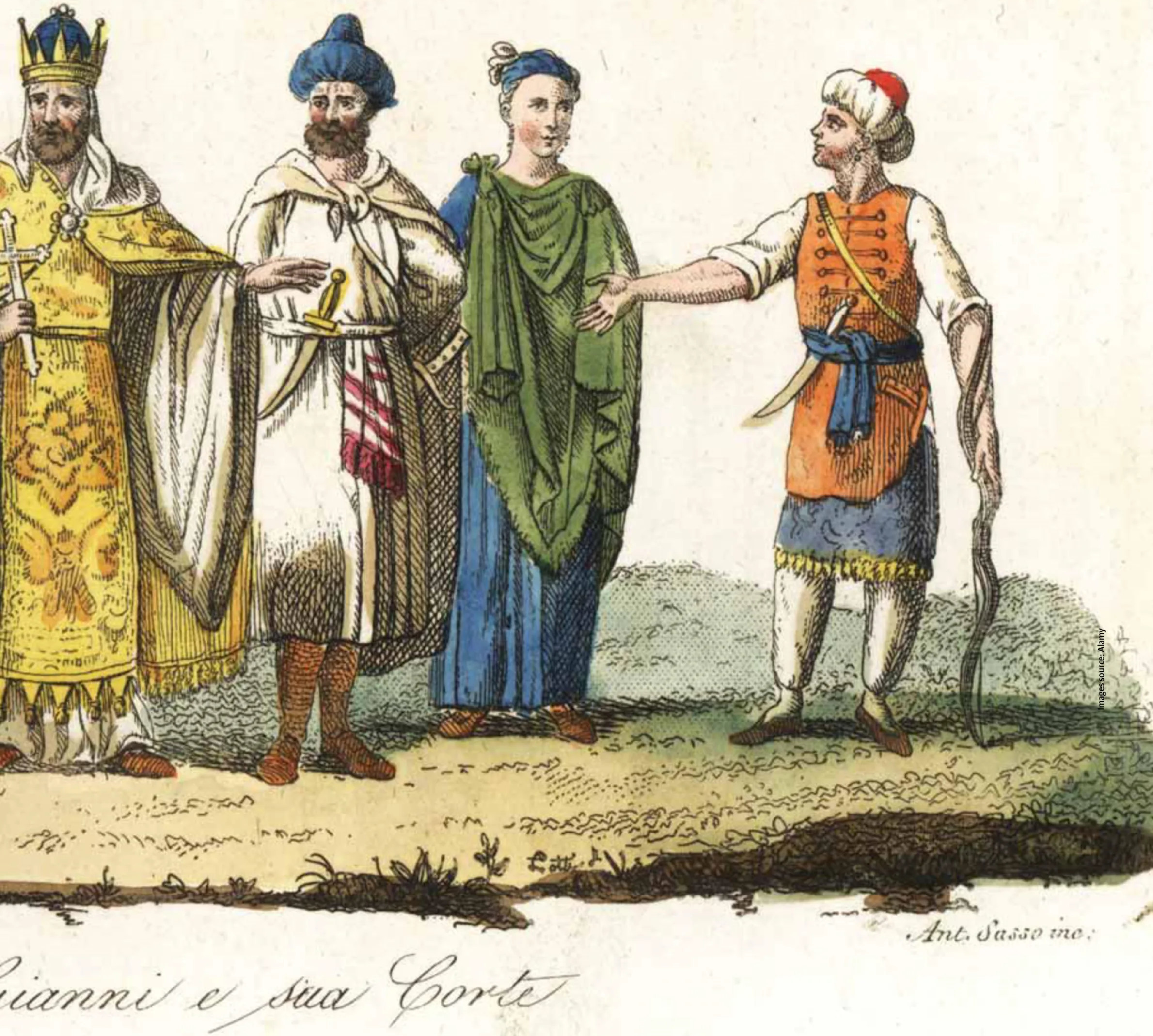
Prester John described in his letters that he was a descendant of one of the biblical Wise Men and ruled a land stretching from India to the setting of the sun. 72 kings were said to be his servants. Monstrous and mythical beasts were common in his domain. The riches he spoke of were far beyond anything that had ever been seen in Europe. Prester John also said that he might be paying his fellow Christians a visit: "We have determined to visit the sepulchre of our Lord with a very large army, in accordance with the glory of our majesty, to humble and chastise the enemies of the cross of Christ and to exalt His blessed name." Copies of these letters were spread rapidly across the continent and could not have come at a better time.

The Crusades launched into the Holy Land were not going well. Christian forces were struggling to hold the land they had seized from Muslim forces. The idea that there might be a mighty Christian kingdom who could come to European aid was a welcome one. In 1221, these hopes seemed to have been realised when word came that King David, heir to Prester John, was sweeping across Persia. Alas for the Europeans, this turned out to be a garbled account of Genghis Khan and his Mongol armies. The pope sent Friar John of Plano Carpini to deliver a message to Genghis, and he had to report that it was unlikely the Khan was related to Prester John. Still, the defeat of several Muslim kingdoms gave European forces the opportunity to temporarily recapture lost territory.

With increased knowledge of the kingdoms of Asia, it came to be believed that Prester John resided in Ethiopia where there was an ancient Christian community. This hope was dashed too when explorers reached there.

Who had written the letters of Prester John in the first place? It is impossible to say. The legend of Prester John remained powerful in Europe for several centuries.

The news of a potent ally against their enemies spread through Christian Europe like wildfire – but would Prester John ever come?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Images source: Alamy

THE SLEEPERS OF EPHESUS

In 250 CE, seven men took shelter from Roman persecution in a cave. They fell asleep, only to wake up three hundred years later

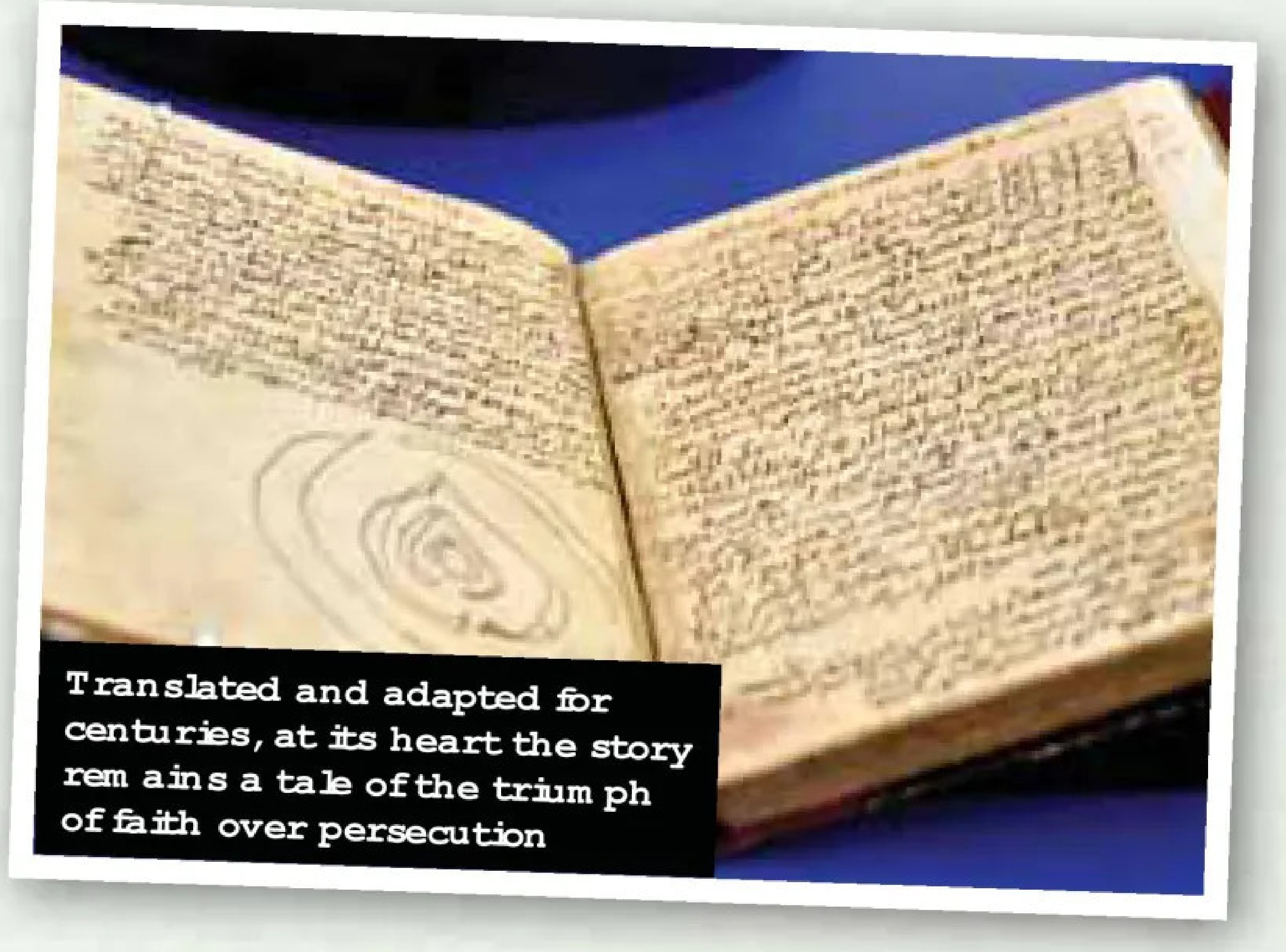
WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

The Sleepers of Ephesus, also known as the Seven Sleepers, has been told in both Christian and Islamic variations. In the Christian version, they were seven young men from wealthy families who gave away their worldly goods to help the poor. They who refused to abandon their Christian faith in order to worship Roman gods. Threatened with persecution, the friends sought sanctuary in a hidden cave outside Ephesus, where they knelt to pray and eventually nodded off to sleep. As they slept, Emperor Decius had the cave sealed, entombing them alive.

300 years later, an unsuspecting farmer opened the cave only to find the young men inside. They woke and greeted him, believing that they had been asleep for no more than a few hours. When one of them crept down to the town to buy supplies, he was astonished to learn that they had slept for three centuries. The story has been retold for centuries, and cited as an example of God taking care of the faithful and protecting them from harm.

The Islamic version is very similar, but doesn't include the number of sleepers who were threatened with persecution. In this version, for the duration of the sleep, the men are guarded by their faithful dog, who sleeps at the mouth of the cave. The legend has since been adapted through the centuries, influencing the works of writers as diverse as John Donne and HG Wells.

Though widely regarded as a legend, several sites have seen been proposed as the real Cave of the Seven Sleepers. Though none of them have been proven to be the location of the magical slumber, one in particular has become a place of pilgrimage for Christians. Today, people still visit the Grotto of the Seven Sleepers on Mount Pion in Turkey, where excavations in the 1920s revealed the ancient ruins of a site of worship, along with numerous graves and inscriptions pertaining to the story of the Seven Sleepers. Meanwhile, others seek out sites across Syria, Jordan, Damascus and other locations, in the hope of finding the place where the legendary sleep took place. Whatever their faith and beliefs, all are making their own pilgrimage, hoping to experience the same spiritual revelation that saved seven young men all those centuries ago.

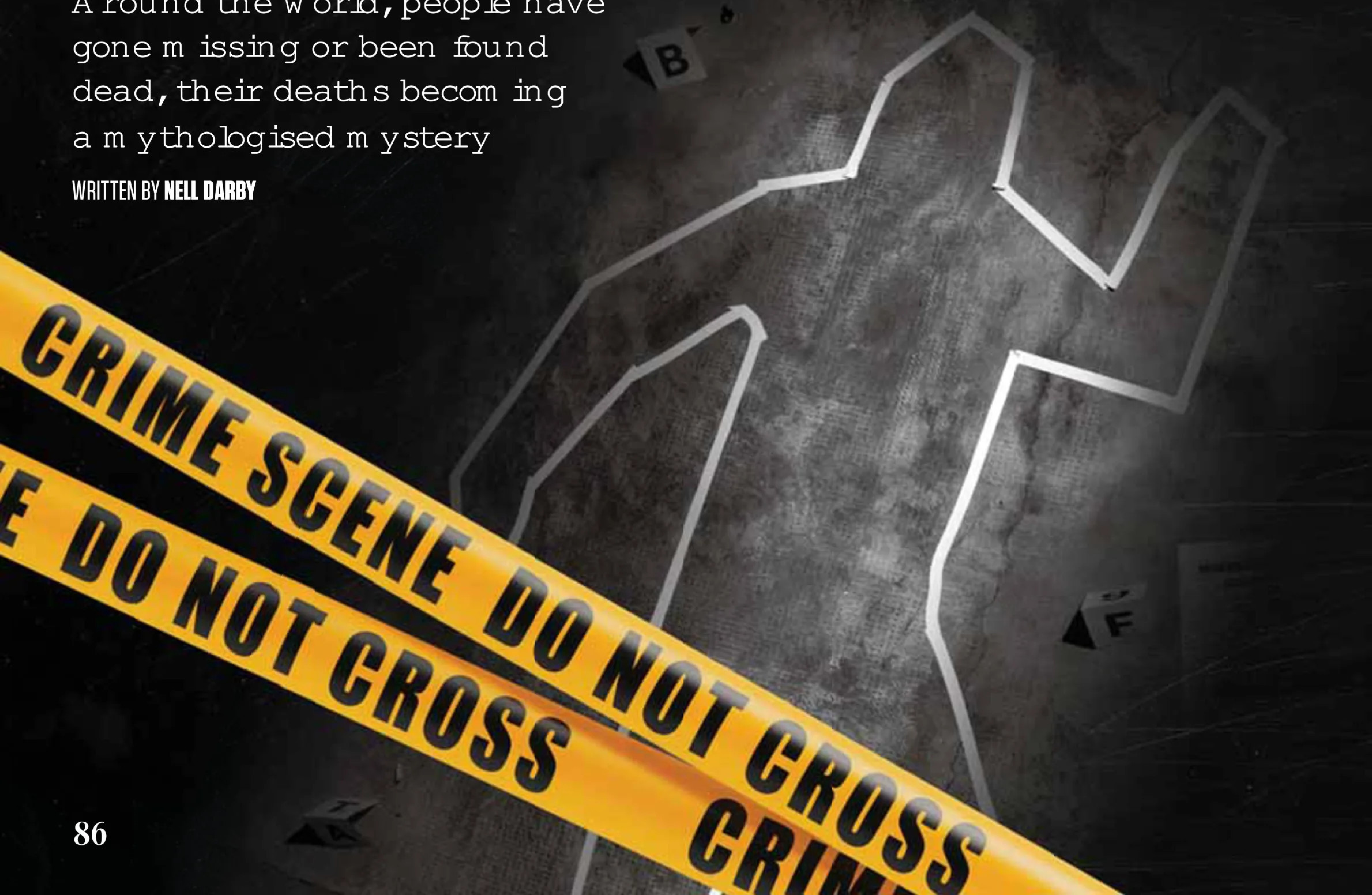

Translated and adapted for centuries, at its heart the story remains a tale of the triumph of faith over persecution

There are many sites that claim to be the place where the seven men fell asleep, including the Cave of the Seven Sleepers outside Ephesus

UNSOLVED MURDERS AND MYSTERIOUS DEATHS

Around the world, people have gone missing or been found dead, their deaths becoming a mythologised mystery

WRITTEN BY **NELL DARBY**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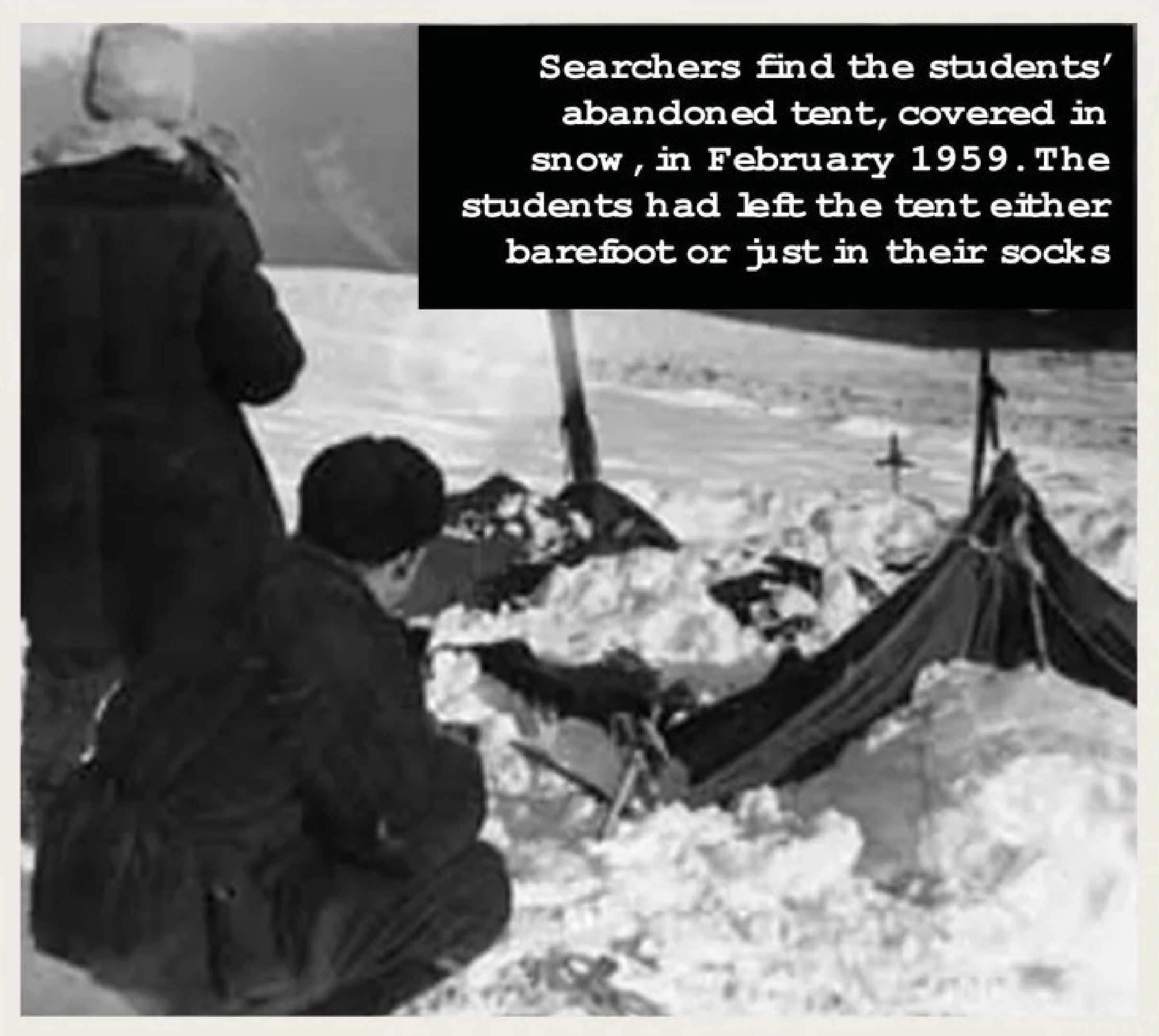
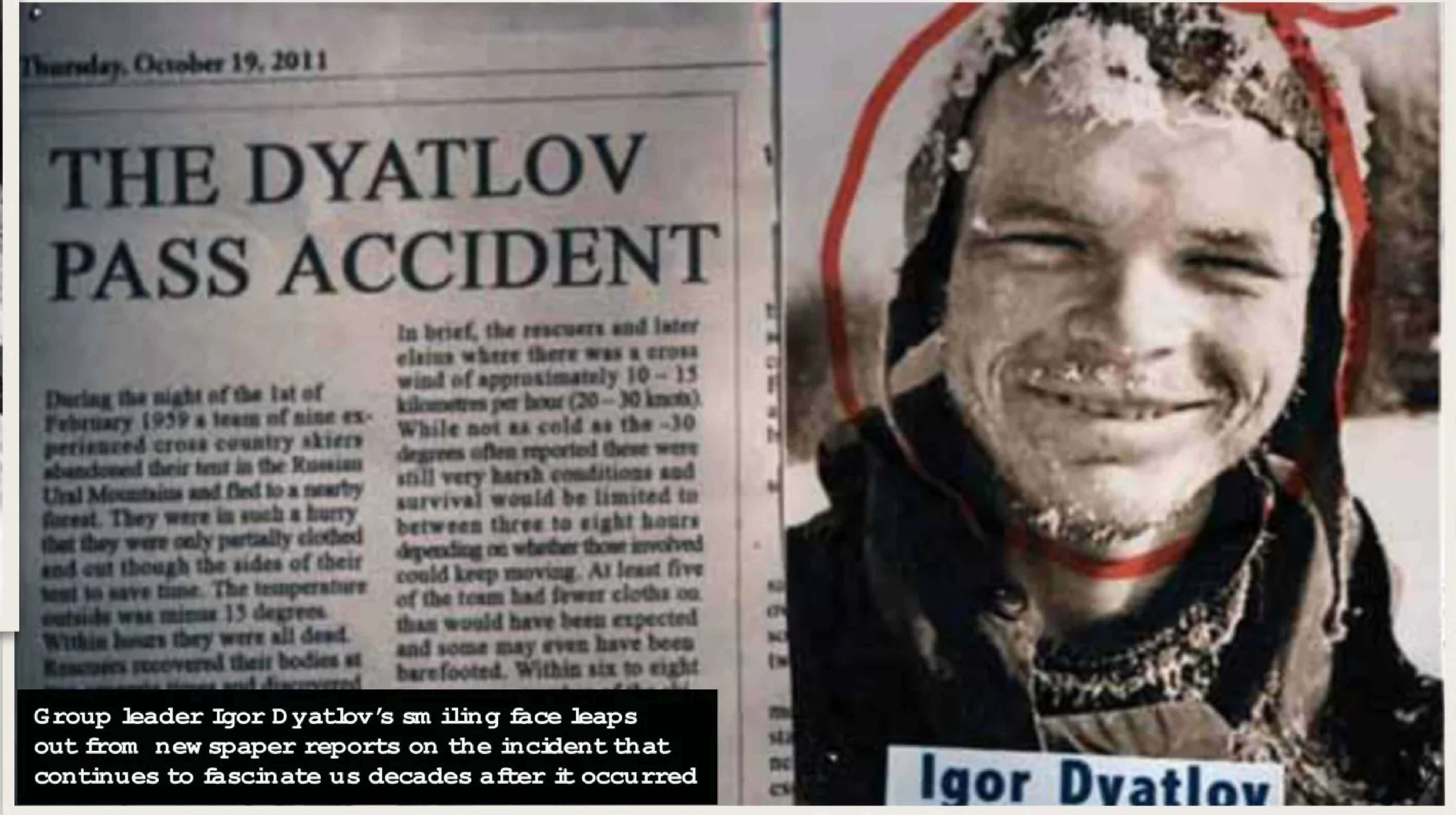


Searchers find the students' abandoned tent, covered in snow, in February 1959. The students had left the tent either barefoot or just in their socks

Mysterious deaths have always grabbed our attention. Even where there might be a logical reason behind a death, we want to believe that we are being lied to, or that there is another reason behind it. Such is human nature; unless we have evidence for something, we are naturally inclined to doubt what we are told, or even what we see. Over the centuries, there have been many mysterious deaths, and attendant conspiracy theories. Here are just a few of the cases that have made us stop and think, and that continue to capture public attention to this day.



Thursday, October 19, 2011

THE DYATLOV PASS ACCIDENT

During the night of the 1st of February 1959 a team of nine experienced cross country skiers abandoned their tent in the Russian Ural Mountains and fled to a nearby forest. They were in such a hurry that they were only partially clothed and cut though the sides of their tent to save time. The temperature outside was minus 15 degrees. Within hours they were all dead. Rescuers recovered their bodies at

In brief, the rescuers and later claims where there was a cross wind of approximately 10 – 15 kilometres per hour (20 – 30 knots). While not as cold as the -30 degrees often reported these were still very harsh conditions and survival would be limited to between three to eight hours depending on whether those involved could keep moving. At least five of the team had fewer cloths on than would have been expected and some may even have been barefooted. Within six to eight

Group leader Igor Dyatlov's smiling face leaps out from newspaper reports on the incident that continues to fascinate us decades after it occurred

THE DYATLOV PASS MYSTERY

They were innocently hiking through the Ural Mountains – but nine young Russians never came back

They were nine experienced 'ski hikers' – using their skis to hike through snowy terrain – who set out one winter's day in 1959 to trek to the summit of a mountain in the Russian wilderness. They never came home, their disappearance becoming an enduring mystery.

The individuals were students and graduates from the Ural Polytechnic Institute, now known as the Ural State Technical University. The institute was based in Yekaterinburg in Russia, a city notorious for being where the Russian imperial family was massacred in 1918. Their base, therefore, already had a rather dark history, and Russia itself was seen to Western eyes as something of a dark and mysterious land. The Cold War had arguably started at the end of World War II, and there was a mutual suspicion between Russia and the United States. Now, coverage of Russian intrigue was exacerbated by this new mystery in the heart of the Ural Mountains.

The ski-hiking trip had been organised by 23-year-old radio engineering student Igor Dyatlov, a keen skier. The group he gathered together originally numbered ten: Igor, together with seven other men and two women, who all wanted to go ski-hiking to the mountain of Otorten. The youngest member of the party was Lyudmila Dubinina, who was just 20 years old; the oldest was Semyon Zolotaryov, who was 38. Most of the party, though, were in their early 20s.

Their plan was to travel by train to the town of Ivdel, from where they would travel by truck to an isolated village called Vizhay. They arrived in Vizhay on 26 January, where they bought loaves of bread to eat, and stayed the night, getting their last decent sleep before starting the trek towards Otorten itself.

Two days in, they lost one of their members, Yuri Yudin; not to any mysterious circumstance, but from health problems. He suffered from rheumatism, and found the pain he was experiencing from his knees and other joints too much to continue. He turned back, but the other nine continued. It would turn out that Yuri had had a lucky escape, and would go on to live a long life – unlike the other students. This was all in

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ДЯТЛОВ И.А.
ЗОЛАТАРЕВ А.И.
КОЛМОГОРОВА З.И.
КРИВОНИЩЕНКО Г.А.
СЛОБОДИН Р.В.
ТИБО-БРИНЬОЛЬ Н.В.

A tomb in Yekaterinburg's Mikhailov Cemetery includes photos of those who died so mysteriously 60 years ago

"They were now exposed to the elements in the depths of winter" the future, however. After Yuri had left them, the others trekked on with their skis and poles, and eventually, on 31 January, they arrived on the edge of highlands that marked a change in conditions to uphill climbing. They went to store some food and equipment in the woods, so that they could retrieve them on their way back – thus also lightening their load during the climb – and on 1 February, they started to move through a pass. They were hoping to get through the pass before setting up camp on the opposite side, but the weather put paid to their plans. Snowstorms moved in, making it virtually impossible to see; the group got confused, travelling in the wrong direction and heading too far west. They could have moved downhill to set up camp in a sheltered area, taking some respite until the weather cleared, but Igor Dyatlov was reluctant to move downhill and then have to head back up later, and so the group, on realising they had gone the wrong way, simply stopped and established their camp on the eastern slope of Kholat Syakhl, a place whose name translates as the ominous 'Dead Mountain'. They were now exposed to the elements in the depths of a Russian winter.

Back in Yekaterinburg, nobody was aware that this is what had happened. Dyatlov had promised to send a telegram back to their sports club when the group returned safely to Vizhay – a date he estimated would be around 12 February, although he had mentioned to the poorly Yuri Yudin that the group might have to take longer. This was not unusual, and the group's friends and families would not have been too worried when no word was sent from Vizhay, as delays could occur. However, when nothing had been heard by 20 February, over a week later, relatives became concerned. A rescue group, involving students and teachers from the Ural Polytechnic Institute, set off in search of the party, but found nothing. Military forces were then sent – but still, it took until 26 February for there to be any news of the missing students.

It was not good news. The search party had found the students' campsite, which included a damaged – and abandoned – tent. Covered in snow, the tent contained all the group's known possessions, including their shoes. Leading out of the tent were eight or nine sets of footprints, indicating that the group, all shoeless, had made their way out of the tent into the snowy expanse, either barefoot or simply in their socks – something that made no sense, given the bitterly cold temperatures of around -30 degrees Celsius (-22 degrees Fahrenheit).

The tracks led 500 metres (1,640 feet) away, at which point they became snow covered. Under a Siberian pine tree were the remains of a small fire – and two bodies, clad only in underwear, barefoot. The bodies were those of Yuri Krivonischenko, and Yuri Doroshenko. Between the pine where the two men's bodies were found, and the abandoned camp, three more bodies were found, each at different distances from the tree. Two were Zinaida Kolmogorova and Rustem Slobodin; the third was the group's leader, Igor Dyatlov.

WHO WAS SEMYON?

There was a further mystery with the Dyatlov Pass nine, when the identity of one of their number was investigated

Semyon Alekseevich Zolotaryov (sometimes spelled Zolotarev) was the oldest of the ski-hikers that fateful February. Born on 2 February 1921, he was 38 at the time, and so might be assumed to have had a more varied life than the others, some of whom were young enough to be his children.

Yet his life might have been even more interesting than anyone could have ever imagined. Rumours abounded about who Semyon actually was, and reached a climax in 2014, when his remains were exhumed following several requests from journalists. His remains indicated first that his injuries were more consistent with a car crash than a natural event; and, even more shockingly, his DNA did not have any link to the DNA of known living relatives of Semyon Zolotaryov. His remains had been buried at the Ivanovskoe Cemetery in Yekaterinburg, Russia, but there were no burial records for anyone of that name there.

The only thing that could be determined positively was that a reconstruction of the face of the buried corpse had similarities to post-war photographs of Semyon. This has led to claims that the man who died in the Urals was someone who had adopted the identity of Semyon after the end of World War II for unknown reasons; truly a mystery in itself.

The dashing Semyon Zolotaryov was the oldest member of the doomed ski-hiking group, but was he who he claimed to be?

This was where the story originally ended: no more bodies were visible. Then on 4 May, more than two months after the original, horrific discoveries, the final four – Lyudmila Dubinina, Alexander Kolevatov, Nikolai Thibeaux-Brignolles and Semyon Zolotaryov were found, buried under four metres (13 feet) of snow in a ravine. It looked like they had died at separate times, and as they had died, their clothes had been taken by the survivors in an attempt to keep warm. Lyudmila was wearing Yuri Krivonischenko's ripped trousers, for example, and had wrapped her left leg in someone else's torn jacket.

What had happened that could have caused the deaths of nine young, fit and well people? These were experienced ski-hikers; men and women who were used to the cold of a Russian winter. Why had they gone out barefoot, en masse, and why were their bodies found in different locations? Various theories abounded about their deaths. It was said that local indigenous people might have attacked the students for being on their territory, but there was no evidence either of other people being present at the time, or of any fighting. The inquests into their deaths should have settled the mystery, but instead, it seemed to increase it. The first five students to have been found were deemed to have died from hypothermia, although it was revealed that Slobodin also had a small skull fracture. However, the bodies found in May were different. Three had substantial skull injuries (Nikolai had died from his); both Lyudmila and Semyon had serious chest fractures, yet no sign of external trauma or soft-tissue damage. Horribly, Lyudmila's eyes and tongue were missing, as were Semyon's eyes.

The official verdict was that all nine had died due to a 'compelling natural force', but it could not be determined what that was.

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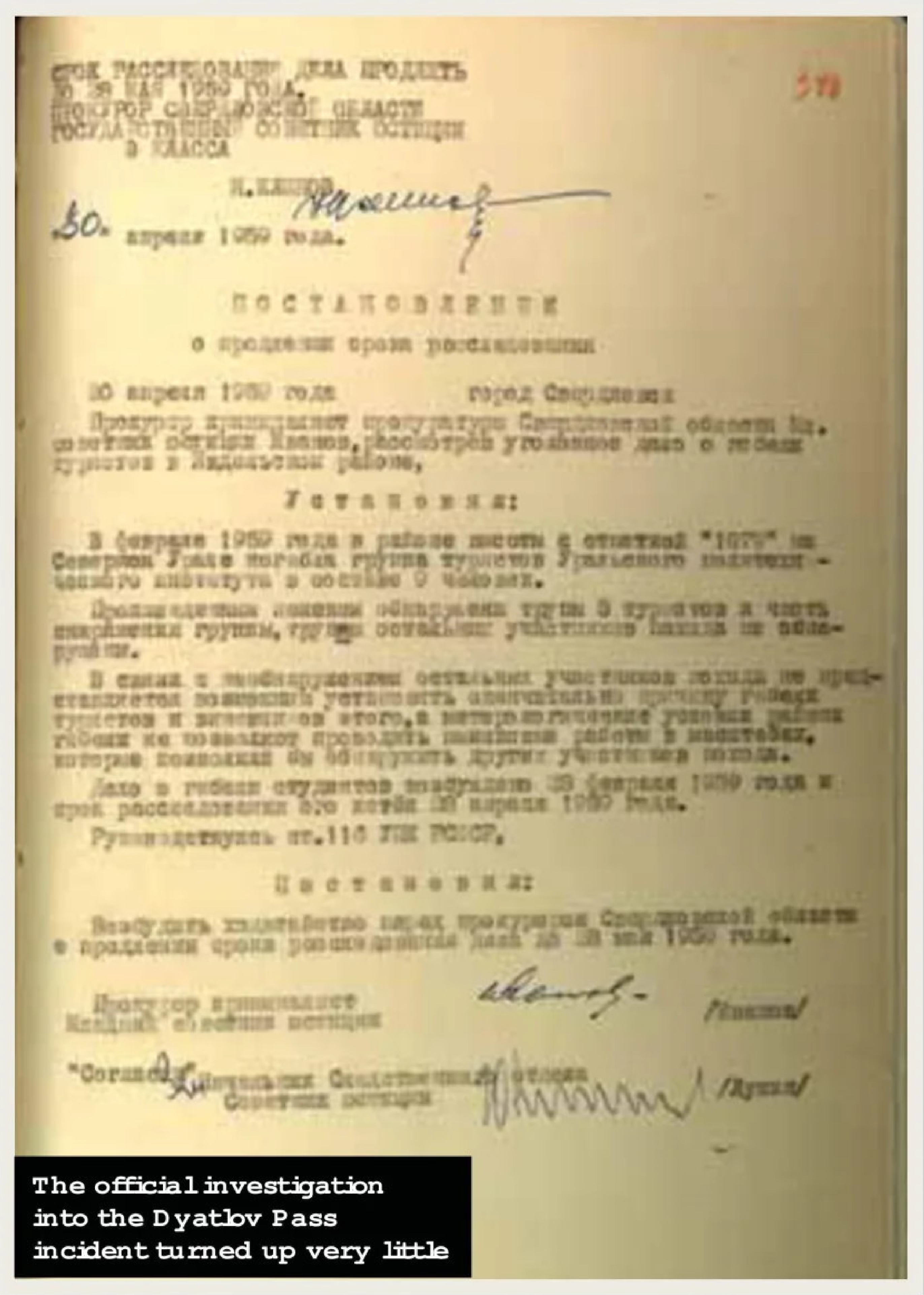


The official investigation into the Dyatlov Pass incident turned up very little

> 'Although they had left behind cameras and diaries, there is still significant doubt about what happened…"

Theories included an avalanche, or the effects of hypothermia, when a person believes they are actually warm, and try and take off layers of clothing, thus exacerbating the situation. But there were problems with determining what had happened. Although some of the individuals had undoubtedly died of hypothermia – and Lyudmila Dubinina's missing eyes and tongue could possibly have been the result of putrefaction, her body being found face down in a stream – others had injuries that couldn't be explained. Although they had left behind cameras and diaries, there is still significant doubt about what happened. Postmortems showed that they hadn't eaten for six to eight hours before they had died, but what they did in those hours is unknown.

That element of the unknown has led to their deaths 60 years ago continuing to be seen as a mystery. Newspaper reports have continued to explore the case over the subsequent decades. In 2013, a film was made based loosely on the events. Originally titled The Dyatlov Pass Incident (it was later renamed Devil's Pass), the fact that this film played rather fast and loose with the original events, and utilised previous theories involving military or even extra-terrestrial involvement, added to the sense of unreality surrounding the original chain of events. Director Renny Harlin says he believes the Dyatlov Pass incident was the result of a government experiment going wrong; one of the theories that has long been posited is the possibility that the group came into contact with the government testing of a nuclear or military weapon. Other theories, too, remain, from a parachute mine exercise to an assault by a Russian Yeti. It is not, then, unsurprising that in February 2019, Russian prosecutors started a new investigation into the case, in an attempt to clear up the rumours and theories around the 'bizarre' deaths. A criminal investigation had originally been opened into the case in February 1959, but when it was decided that nature was to blame, the investigation was shelved after just three months.

This remarkable new investigation presented their findings in July 2020, revealing their conclusion that the group had perished as a result of hypothermia caused by an avalance, which forced the unprepared group to vacate their camp in poor visibility. "It was a heroic struggle. There was no panic. But they had no chance to save themselves under the circumstances," concluded the deputy head of the regional prosecutor's office, Andrey Kuryakov.

BELLA IN THE WYCH ELM

The Hagley Wood mystery started with boys searching for birds' nests, but ended as something more ominous

It was April 1943, and World War II was being fought, affecting the daily lives of millions. Yet in Hagley Wood, near Birmingham, children were continuing to play as normal, war being something of an abstract concept for children who hadn't been evacuated.

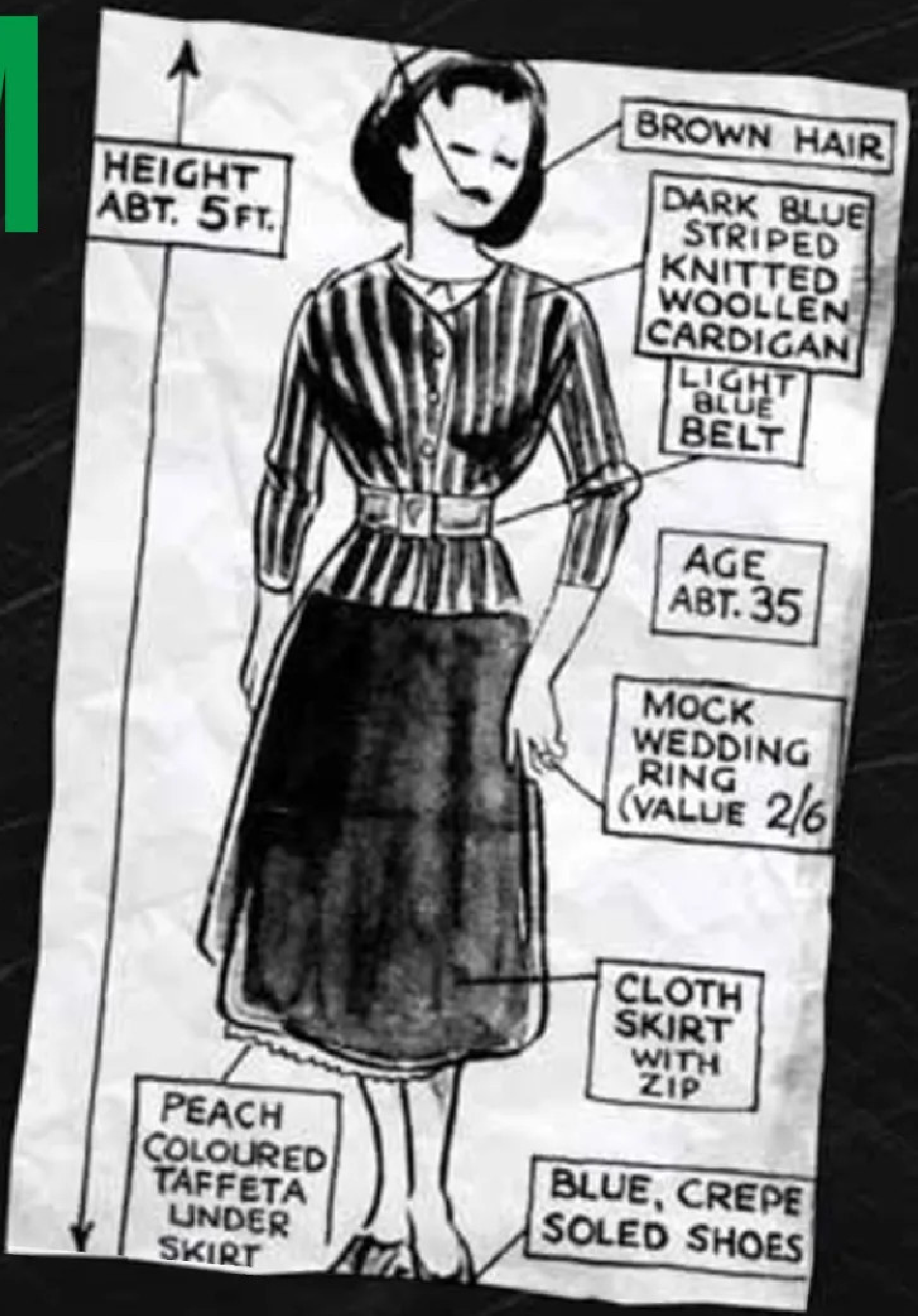
On one spring day that April, four boys were out searching for birds' nests and their eggs. In their mid-teens, this might be the last year such innocent occupations would be their focus; it certainly would be after this fateful day's events.

The boys spotted a fascinating tree, an old wych elm. It had a hollowed-out trunk, and was rather creepy looking. Fifteen-year-old Bob Farmer was despatched to climb the tree, but from higher up, he looked back down into the hollow trunk. A face – or what had once been a face – was looking back at him.

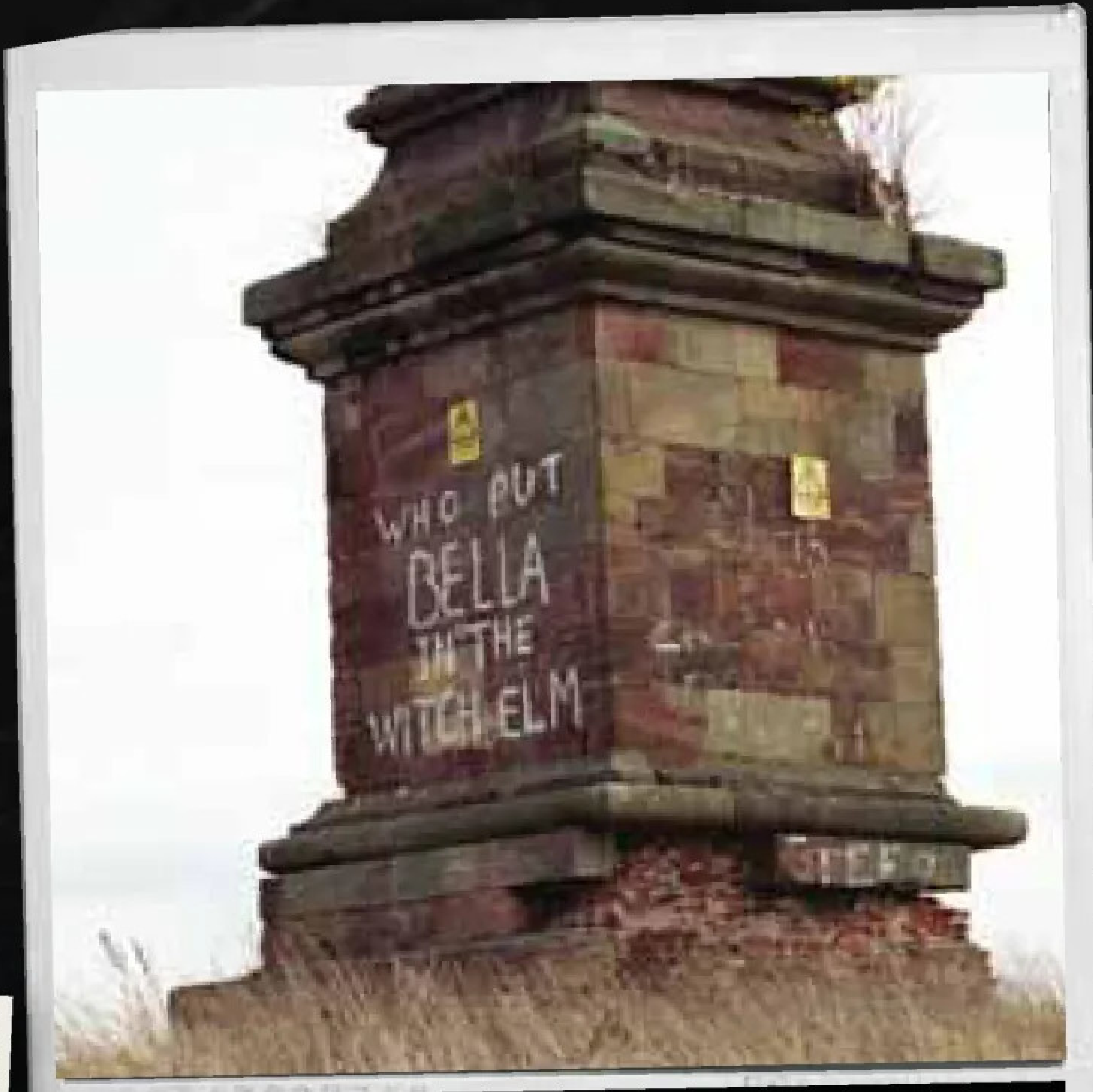
Bob had seen a skull, still with some hair and skin attached. He and his friends, being curious boys still, although obviously shocked, examined the skull, before replacing it. When they got home, one boy told his father, who called the police. What they then found was the body of a young woman – taffeta stuffed in her mouth – wearing a blue, striped cardigan, a skirt, and a pair of old shoes. Her body was examined, and it was determined that she was around 35 years old, a mother, and small – just five feet tall. She had also been dead for up to two years. Nobody seemed to know who she was, and after the initial interest in her, it waned, and her identity, it appeared, would never be known. But then, after eight months, graffiti started to appear locally, each being a permutation of the question: 'Who put Bella in the wych elm?' The graffiti was all in the same hand, but in different locations. Bella was referred to as Bella, Luebella, or 'Hagley Wood Bella'.

There were now two mysteries: who was the young woman found murdered in the wych elm, and who was the person leaving the graffiti? Did that person know 'Bella', or know who killed her? Or was it the murderer himself leaving incriminating messages, frustrated that the police could not get anywhere with the case? Theories continued to be explored over the years that followed, mainly involving witchcraft, as Bella's hand had been severed. A decade after her corpse was discovered, a letter was sent to a local journalist, claiming that Bella had been killed as part of a Nazi spy ring. Then Bella's body itself went missing.

Over the past 70 years, Bella has continued to fascinate investigators and historians. In 2018, her face was re-created using craniofacial identification, but her identity remains unknown, and likely will for eternity.

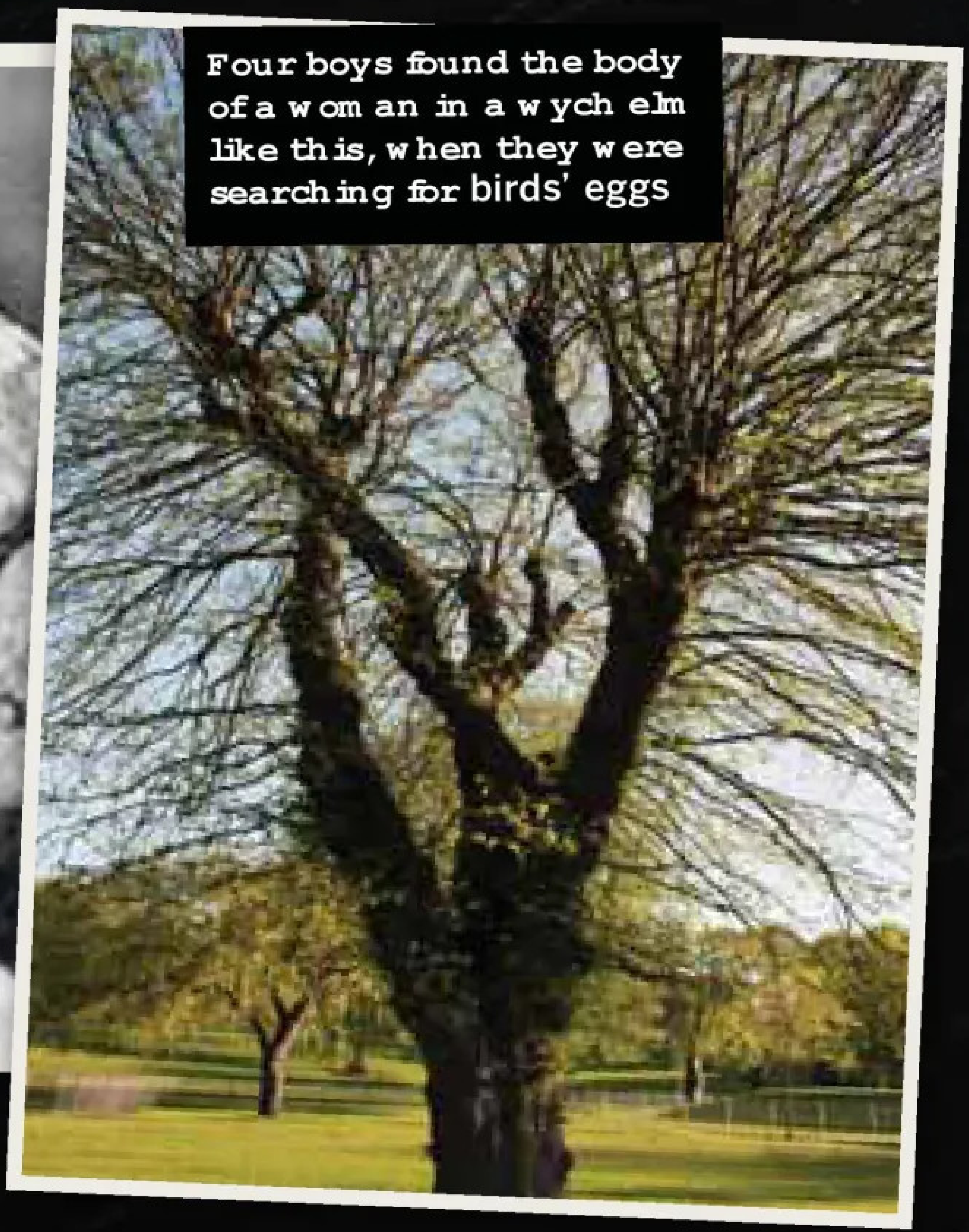

HEIGHT ABT. 5 FT.
BROWN HAIR
DARK BLUE STRIPED KNITTED WOOLLEN CARDIGAN
LIGHT BLUE BELT
AGE ABT. 35
MOCK WEDDING RING (VALUE 2/6
CLOTH SKIRT WITH ZIP
PEACH COLOURED TAFFETA UNDER SKIRT
BLUE, CREPE SOLED SHOES

A drawing of Bella' and the clothes she was found in was produced to aid identification, but the woman remains unknown to this day



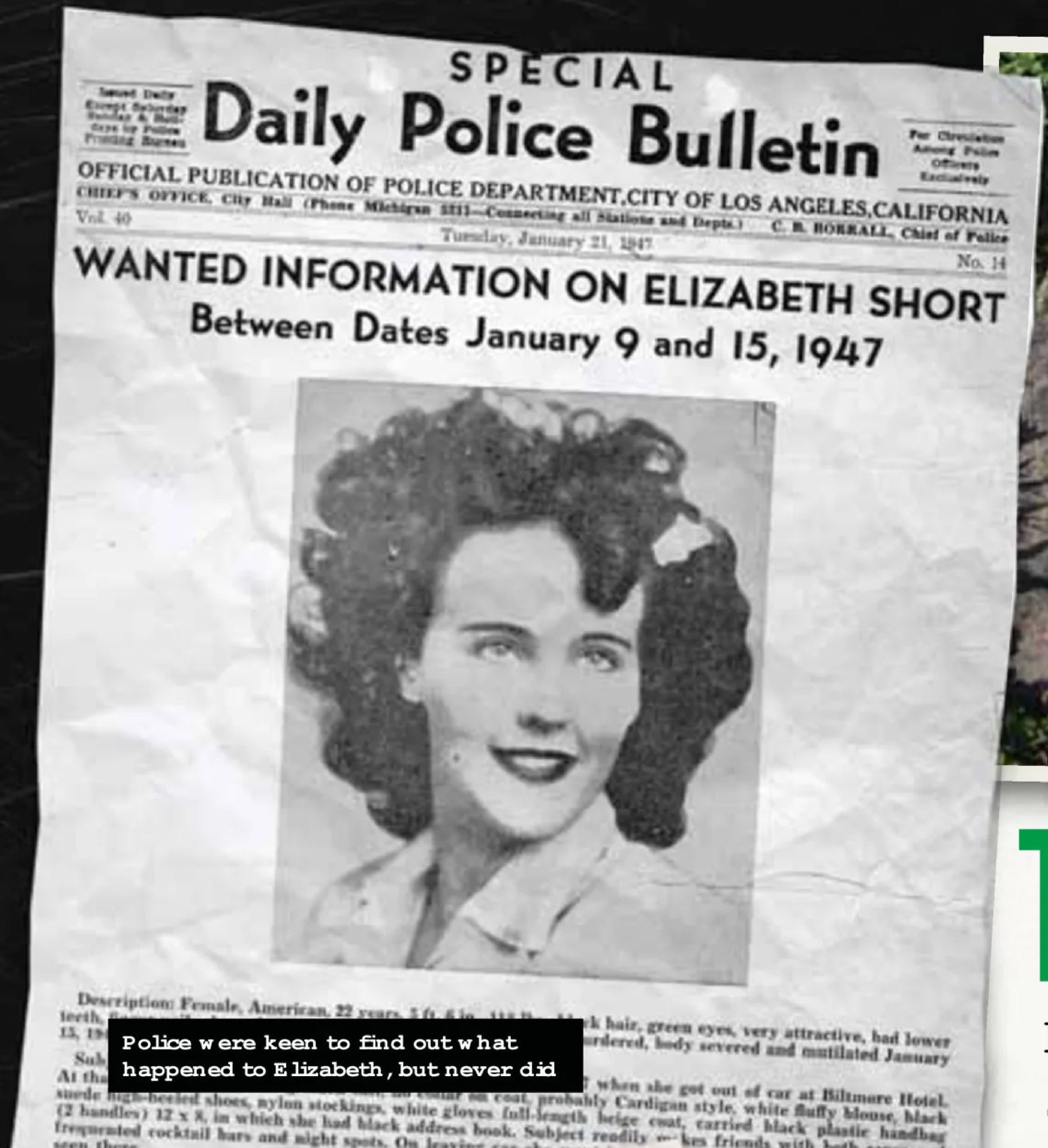
A monument in Hagley shows how the Hagley Wood mystery has never been forgotten. The graffiti echoes the 1940s' examples found in the area

The skull of Bella, the unknown woman whose body was found in a wych elm tree in the Midlands in 1943



Four boys found the body of a woman in a wych elm like this, when they were searching for birds' eggs

> 'A letter was sent to a local journalist, claiming that bella had been killed as part of a nazi spy ring"



SPECIAL

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For Circulation Among Police Officers Exclusively

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF POLICE DEPARTMENT, CITY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

CHIEF'S OFFICE, City Hall (Phone Michigan 5211—Connecting all Stations and Depts.) C. B. HORRALL, Chief of Police

Vol. 40

Tuesday, January 21, 1947

No. 14

WANTED INFORMATION ON ELIZABETH SHORT

Between Dates January 9 and 15, 1947

Description: Female, American, 22 years, 5 ft. 6 in.

k hair, green eyes, very attractive, had lower

urdered, body severed and mutilated January

when she got out of car at Biltmore Hotel.

suede high-heeled shoes, nylon stockings, white gloves full-length beige coat, probably Cardigan style, white fluffy blouse, black (2 handles) 12 x 8, in which she had black address book. Subject readily carried black plastic handbag frequented cocktail bars and night spots. On leaving car she went

kes friends with both sexes and seen there.

of the Biltmore, and was last

Inquiry should be made at all hotels,

ascertain whereabouts of victim betw

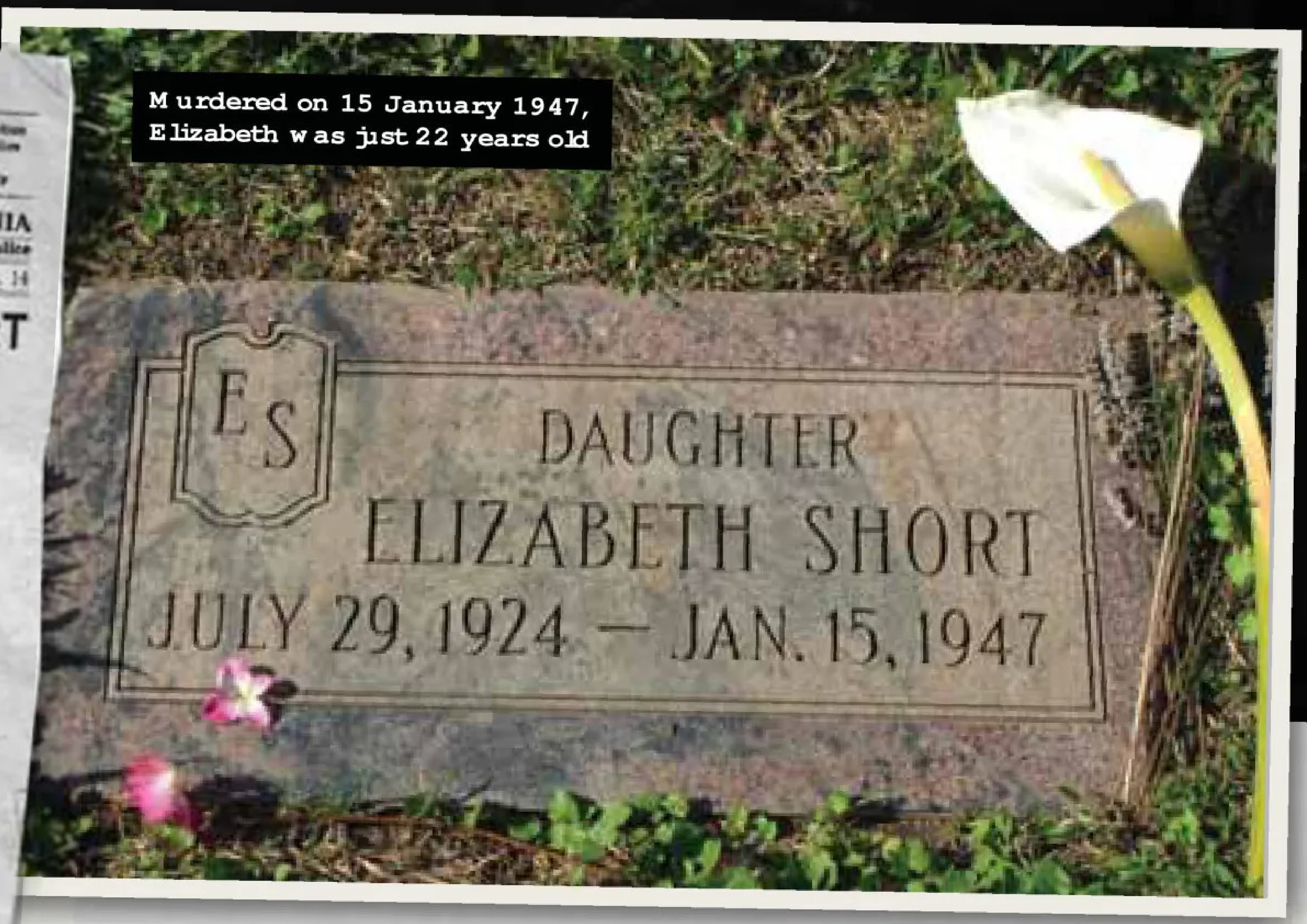
as Elizabeth

rs and lounges, night clubs to

Attention

62 2928 43

Police were keen to find out what happened to Elizabeth, but never did



Murdered on 15 January 1947, Elizabeth was just 22 years old

THE BLACK DAHLIA

Found dead and mutilated in an LA street, Elizabeth Short has been the subject of many books since…

Her face still looks out from the covers of several books today. She looks away to the side, smiling; a striking young woman with a mass of artfully curled black hair, a made-up face and a look of hopefulness. This is Elizabeth Short, an aspiring actress at 22 years old. Another image, though, also shows the same woman in a different light. This time, she stares straight at the camera, mouth open, her expression more aggressive, less innocent, posing for a mugshot after her arrest for underage drinking. Both images are of Elizabeth, and they reflect the different sides of her personality.

Although she is forever now associated with Los Angeles, Elizabeth, who became known as the 'Black Dahlia', was actually born in Boston on 29 July 1924, the third of five daughters. Her father deserted his family when she was just five. Two years older than Marilyn Monroe, both, like so many other young women of the 1930s and 1940s, would seek to make their mark in the movie-making business. Unfortunately, Elizabeth was never to make it in life, although she became famous in death. She was quick to move from Boston, and was eager to settle in California, where her father now lived. She didn't get on with the man she hadn't seen since she was a child and soon moved on. In the summer of 1946, she moved to LA in the hope of getting an acting break. It never came.

Her body was found in a vacant lot near Leimert Park on the night of 15 January 1947. She had been cut in half, drained of blood and mutilated, but then – bizarrely – washed. A local woman found the nude body, looking more like a doll than a real woman.

However, this was a woman – one whose face had been slashed, and whose intestines had been pulled out. She had been raped, but had died from blows to her head and face, her body being cut in half postmortem.

A crowd of onlookers soon began to gather at the scene, including journalists, and this became symbolic of the case – a murder that attracted, and continues to attract, substantial attention. It is now said to be one of the oldest unsolved cases in LA County, and despite numerous investigations, suspects and theories, it is likely to remain so.

Elizabeth Short was an aspiring actress who hoped her move to Los Angeles would bring her success. Instead, it brought her death

THE ICEMAN OF ICELAND

The incredible story of Guðlaugur Friðþórsson, the Icelandic fisherman who refused to freeze to death

WRITTEN BY **POPPY-JAY ST PALMER**

The tale of Guðlaugur Friðþórsson is like that of an old folk ballad, but everything you're about to read is entirely true. Guðlaugur's remarkable story begins on the harsh, stormy ocean surrounding Heimaey Island, the largest island in the Westman Islands archipelago in Iceland.

At 10pm on 11 March 1984, five young Icelandic fishermen were thrown into the brine when their trawl net became caught on the ocean floor and their boat capsized. Two of the men died instantly. The other three fought to stay alive by crawling onto the keel of the boat for the first 45 minutes. Alone and against the elements, they were forced to attempt the swim to shore. The bitter air temperature was -2°C on that cold winter night, while the ocean was between 5 and 6°C, and after just ten minutes two more men were lost beneath the icy waves.

The final fisherman, 23-year-old Guðlaugur Friðþórsson, kept swimming through the night, guided by nothing but a far-off lighthouse. After nearly six hours, he made it to the water's edge at the most dangerous section of Heimaey Island's coastline. When he finally found a section safe enough to tackle, he dragged himself onto shore, his shirt, jeans and sweater waterlogged and freezing cold.

Making it to land was only the first leg of his incredible journey. Barefoot, Guðlaugur walked three kilometres across a lava field, frozen into shards like glass. Thirsty and exhausted, he stumbled upon an old free-standing bathtub used to supply sheep and horses with water. The harsh weather conditions meant the tub had completely frozen over, but Guðlaugur used his fist to punch a hole through the surface to drink. His thirst quenched, he continued on and finally knocked on the first house he found.

The door was opened by a startled 17-year-old boy named Freyr Atlason, who Guðlaugur ordered to call for an ambulance before collapsing on the floor. It had been nine hours since the boat capsized, and nine hours he had survived. But Guðlaugur Friðþórsson's story gets even more unbelievable.

Upon reaching the hospital, Guðlaugur's body temperature was below 34°C but he showed absolutely no symptoms of hypothermia except dehydration. He had been at the mercy of the elements, had spent nine hours in almost unsurvivable conditions, and not only lived to tell the tale but showed almost no physical signs of his ordeal. By pure luck, researchers discovered that Guðlaugur's body just happened to have a phenomenal resistance to cold.

The only lasting mark is the bathtub, which still stands on Heimaey Island to commemorate Guðlaugur's journey, and the other four fishermen who sadly weren't as lucky.

The ocean surrounding Heimaey Island on the night of Guðlaugur's journey is believed to have been between 5 and 6°C

A volcanic lava field covered in snow, much like the one Guðlaugur crossed barefoot

Images source: Getty Images

WEIRD SCIENCE

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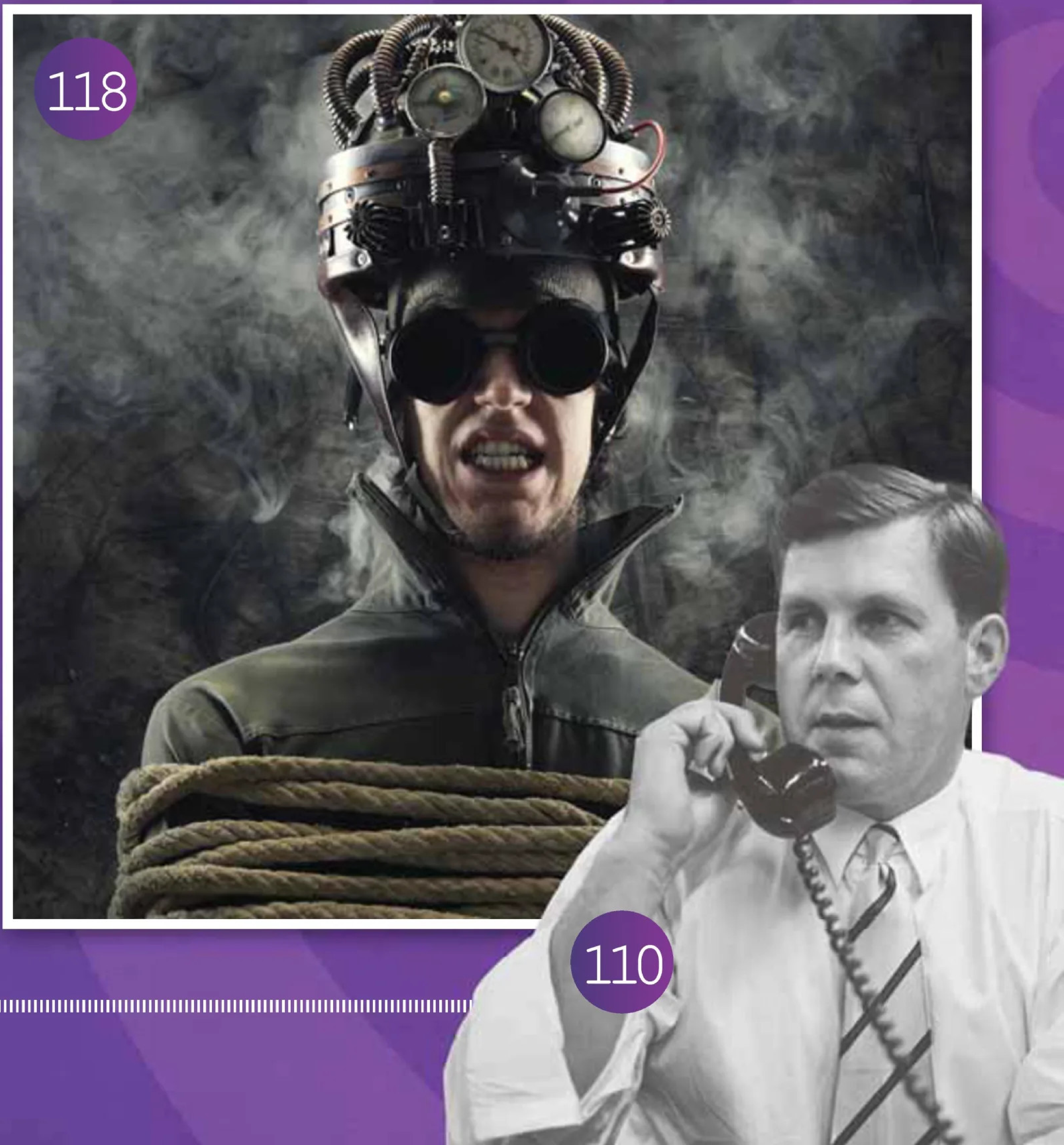

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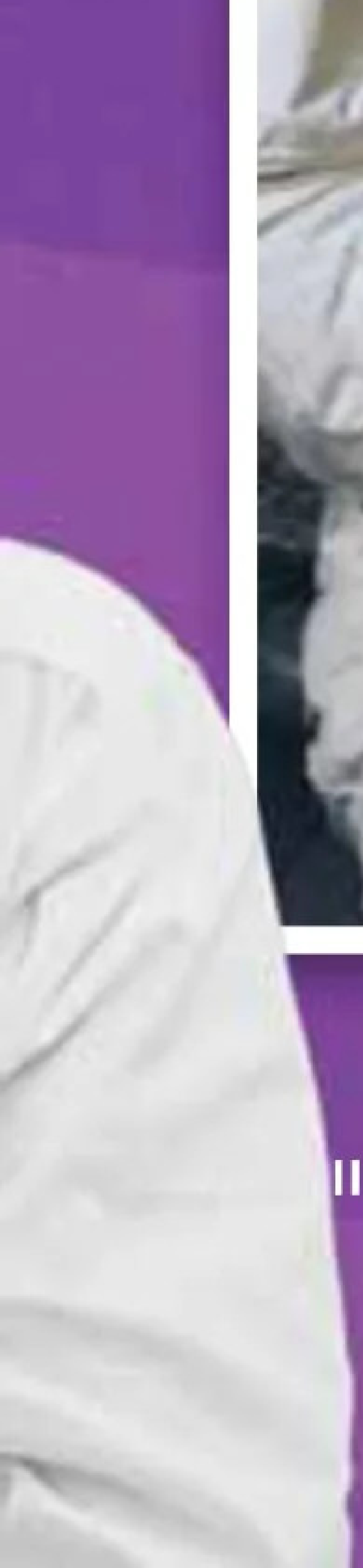

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ARE WE REALLY ALONE?

Have governments across the globe covered up proof of alien life? From ancient carvings to abductions, the truth really could be out there…

WRITTEN BY **CHARLES GINGER**

The meaning and mystery surrounding the existence of human life has occupied the greatest minds since the dawning of philosophy in Ancient Greece. Why are we here? What is the point of life? How did it even come to be? These fundamental questions are difficult enough to grapple with, but what about when they are applied beyond the boundaries of our planet? The answer is a field of endless exploration and countless possibilities centred around arguably the most important quandary of all: are we alone? Your own answer to this question may well be changed by what you are about to read.

TAKE US TO YOUR LEADER

It is no secret that online conspiracy theories are flourishing like never before, and yet while many of them can be dismissed as ridiculous, the potential involvement of various governments in the cover-up of extraterrestrial encounters is not an argument easily waved away.

Those who argue that numerous governments are guilty of suppressing evidence of alien visitations include the former chairman of the NATO Military Committee and chief of Britain's Defence Staff Admiral Lord Hill-Norton, the first director of the CIA, Vice Admiral Roscoe H Hillenkoetter, astronauts Edgar Mitchell and Gordon Cooper, and Paul Hellyer, the former Canadian defence minister. The claims of such prestigious figures that both the US and British authorities have actively sought to suppress extraterrestrial information begs the question of what exactly they are trying to hide.

At the height of the Cold War between 1947 and 1969 over 12,000 sightings of UFOs were reported to the United States Air Force. These included strange saucers and mysterious lights. Coupled with the reports of a civilian pilot by the name of Kenneth Arnold, who in 1947 claimed that he had seen nine bluish-white objects moving in a V formation at great speed over Mount Rainier in Washington, this led to the birth of Project Sign in 1948, an official government investigation into UFO sightings. While those tasked with carrying out the inquiry reasoned that most of the UFOs spotted during this time were probably Soviet aircraft, they had to concede that the exact origins of the ghostly silhouettes being spotted across America remained a mystery. Even so, this was apparently enough justification for General Hoyt Vandenberg, then chief of staff of the US Air Force, to order the closure of the project on the grounds it had not produced sufficient proof of the existence of UFOs.

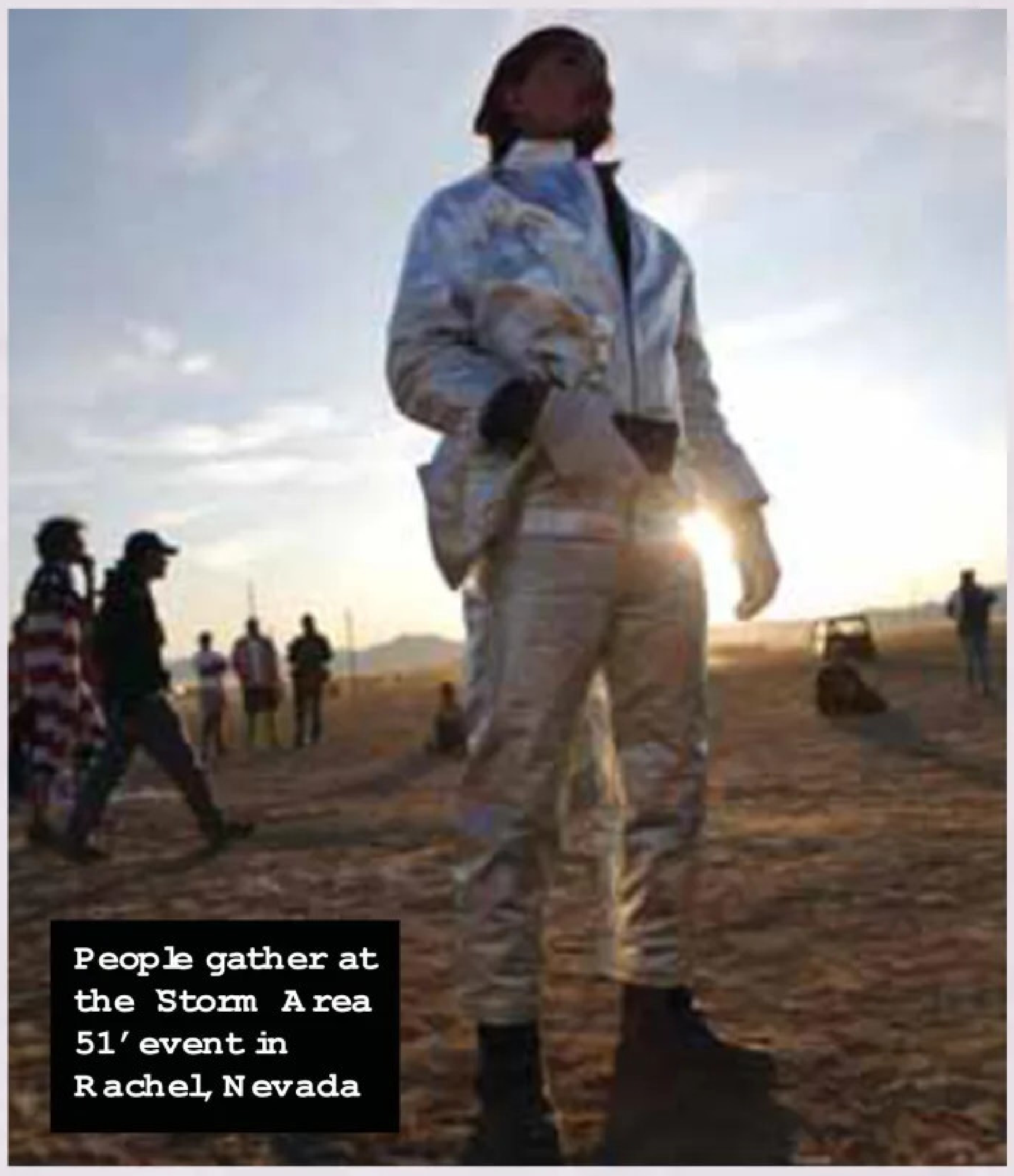
> During the Cold War over 12,000 sightings of UFOs were reported to the US Air Force

Project Sign was followed by two further investigations (Grudge and Blue Book, the latter being the longest-running official UFO inquiry), which were led by Captain Edward Ruppelt, who later wrote that Project Sign had produced an "estimate of the situation" that supported the idea of UFOs being responsible for the strange apparitions regularly seen soaring through the skies above America. Interestingly, evidence that supports Ruppelt's argument has never been forthcoming.

The American government is not the only one to have conducted its own alien investigation. In the 1950s Britain's Ministry of Defence undertook a UFO project of its own, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Defence's chief scientific adviser and radar scientist Sir Henry Tizard. He was insistent that sightings of UFOs should not be dismissed without proper scientific study. In time this gave birth to the aptly nicknamed Flying Saucer Working Party, a group of intelligence experts charged with delving into the truth behind bizarre phenomena in Britain. In June 1951 it published a report stating that every incident the group had examined could be explained by perfectly normal causes ranging from mistaking a bird for something else or a straight-up hoax.

Pilots EJ Smith, Kenneth Arnold, and Ralph E Stevens look at a photo of a UFO

Despite the US military admitting that Area 51 is used for researching stealth aircraft, many conspiracists believe it is home to evidence of aliens



People gather at the 'Storm Area 51' event in Rachel, Nevada

A HOME FROM HOME?

Despite the historic efforts of the US government to uncover the truth about alien life, and its subsequent assurances that UFOs can be explained away, the presence of a certain air base in the middle of the Nevada Desert continues to undermine the official account: Area 51.

The name Area 51 is said to come from its map designation on a grid system once used by the now-defunct Atomic Energy Commission. Officially known as Homey Airport (or Groom Lake), this highly classified facility is situated on the Nevada Test and Training Range approximately 120 miles northwest of Las Vegas. Stretching over 38,400 acres, the land was withdrawn from public use in 1958 under Public Land Order 1662. It is also impossible to enter its airspace without permission from air traffic control. Heavily armed guards patrol its perimeter to discourage anyone from trying to gain access, and, if necessary, they are authorised to use lethal force. When a man attempted to breach the base's defences in January 2019 he was shot following his refusal to follow the instructions of Nevada National Security Site (NNSS) officers. Incidents such as this, coupled with the high level of security surrounding Area 51, has only served to feed numerous conspiracies as to what lies inside those razor-wire fences. Some believe the wreckage from the most notorious UFO event in history is still being stored within the base.

In July 1947 rumours of a UFO crashing in Roswell, New Mexico, began to circulate after strange debris was found scattered across a sandy plain 30 miles north of the town. While the US Air Force was quick to dispel talk of an alien arrival by insisting the tangled metal came from a downed weather balloon, press interest in the recovered debris continued to fuel local interest. However, it wasn't until the late 1970s that a group of dedicated UFO researchers interviewed people connected to the crash. Their findings were out of this world. According to hundreds of documents pertaining to the incident, a UFO did indeed smash into the Nevada sand on that fateful July day. The bodies of its deceased pilots were then whisked away along with the wreckage on the orders of the authorities, who then concocted a cover story so as to avoid mass panic.

US Air Force Officer Irving Newton inspects debris from the Roswell crash

Images source: Getty, Wiki

The mystery of how aliens might look has continued to fascinate those who believe in them

The east gate of the former US Air Force base in Rendlesham Forest, dubbed as Britain's Roswell'

Wikipedia, Taras Young / CC BY-SA

Efforts to uncover the truth lasted into the 1990s, when the US military finally admitted that the 'weather balloon' had in fact been a nuclear test surveillance balloon deployed as part of Project Mogul, an operation that saw the US attempting to detect the telltale signals of a Soviet nuclear weapons test. Yet this belated official explanation did little to deter the conspiracists, many of whom remain convinced that the "most thoroughly debunked UFO claim" is in fact a government cover-up and that Area 51 is really used to make contact with aliens.

Interest in the mysterious goings on at Area 51 reached its zenith in September 2019 when plans to storm the base began to circulate online. Inspired by a Facebook event posted by 21-year-old California student Matty Roberts in July calling fellow UFO believers to "storm Area 51, they can't stop all of us", what was originally a joke gained immediate traction. Millions of online users vowed to help in raiding the base to reveal its secrets, and a date of 20 September was set for this daring undertaking. Such was the level of official concern that a spokesperson for the US military warned people against trying to enter the facility and a state of emergency was declared in two counties.

In the end a harmless festival dubbed Alienstock was held nearby, and only two Dutch YouTubers made it anywhere close to the base. Their reward was to be arrested, fined and returned to the Netherlands. Yet the fact that the government took the threat of a mass invasion of Area 51 so seriously does beg the question of what they are so desperate to keep secret. Could it really be proof of alien life?

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS

Roswell and the secrets of Area 51 may occupy most of the UFO landscape, but America is far from alone when it comes to potential sightings of alien life. When it comes to instances of the unexplained, what unfolded in late December 1980 within the shadows of Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, takes some beating.

Known as 'Britain's Roswell', the event is still keenly debated by UFO enthusiasts and sceptics alike, and in the almost 40 years since the incident took place accounts and facts still remain unclear and often contradictory. So just what did happen within this otherwise peaceful wood?

At approximately 3am on the morning of 26 December military personnel patrolling the perimeter of RAF Woodbridge spotted strange lights above the forest. Initially believing an aircraft had crashed, they ventured into the trees to investigate and, according to the claims of several witnesses, stumbled upon a glowing metallic object ringed with coloured lights.

One Ministry of Defence employee, Nick Pope, later co-authored a book about the sighting titled Encounter in Rendlesham Forest: The Inside Story of the World's Best Documented UFO Incident, in which he stated, "This was not some vague 'lights in the sky' sighting – the UFO actually landed."

Two days later a further investigation of the supposed landing site revealed unusual levels of radiation, and as Lieutenant Colonel Charles Halt and his staff searched for evidence they are said to have noticed three lights in the sky that, according to Halt, seemed to be hovering and ejecting streams of light.

BARNEY AND BETTY'S ALIEN ADVENTURE

The apparent abduction of a New Hampshire couple in 1966 is still the most famous case of an alien kidnapping

In September 1961 Barney and Betty Hill of New Hampshire, US, decided to embark on a spontaneous three-day trip to Montreal and Niagara Falls for a delayed honeymoon. On the final night of their vacation, as they drove home in the dark, the couple noticed a strange light apparently following them through the White Mountains of their home state. Stopping the car, Barney reached for his gun and clambered to confront their skybound stalker. What the couple saw next would change their lives forever.

A wide, flat, metallic disc landed on the roof of the car and began to emit a beeping noise that immediately made the couple feel drowsy. They would wake up two hours later 35 miles down the road to find their watches had stopped working and their shoes and clothes were scuffed and torn in places. Neither of them could remember the previous few hours.

Later, while under hypnosis, the couple would recall being experimented on by grey beings with wide eyes while a "leader" watched on from the side of a rounded room bathed in bright light. Not only did they remove hair and nail clippings, but according to Betty the aliens spoke to their captives and showed them a star map, which Betty was able to draw. Nobody knows what really happened to the couple.

Barney and Betty Hill attempt to illustrate the UFO that they claimed abducted them

Images source: Getty, Wiki

These incredible sightings have since been explained by astronomers as the light emitted by especially bright stars, and a light spotted to the east is believed to have been caused by the nearby Orfordness Lighthouse. But Halt remains convinced he saw a UFO. Speaking in 2015, he claimed to have fresh evidence to support his argument.

"I have confirmation that [radar operators] saw the object go across their 60-mile scope in two or three seconds, [travelling at] thousands of miles an hour. He [the UFO] came back across their scope again, [and] stopped near the water tower. They watched it and observed it go into the forest where we were," said Halt. "At Wattisham [airfield] they picked up what they called a 'bogie' and lost it near Rendlesham Forest. Whatever was there was clearly under intelligent control."

ANCIENT EVIDENCE?

The idea of UFO sightings is commonly imagined as a 20th-century phenomenon, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that our ancient ancestors may well have had alien encounters of their own. Prehistoric drawings have been found on cave walls depicting non-human and non-animal creatures as well as many mysterious unexplained symbols. Scribblings unearthed in Charama, India, that are believed to be approximately 10,000 years old clearly depict alien-like beings not too dissimilar from those shown in Hollywood blockbusters.

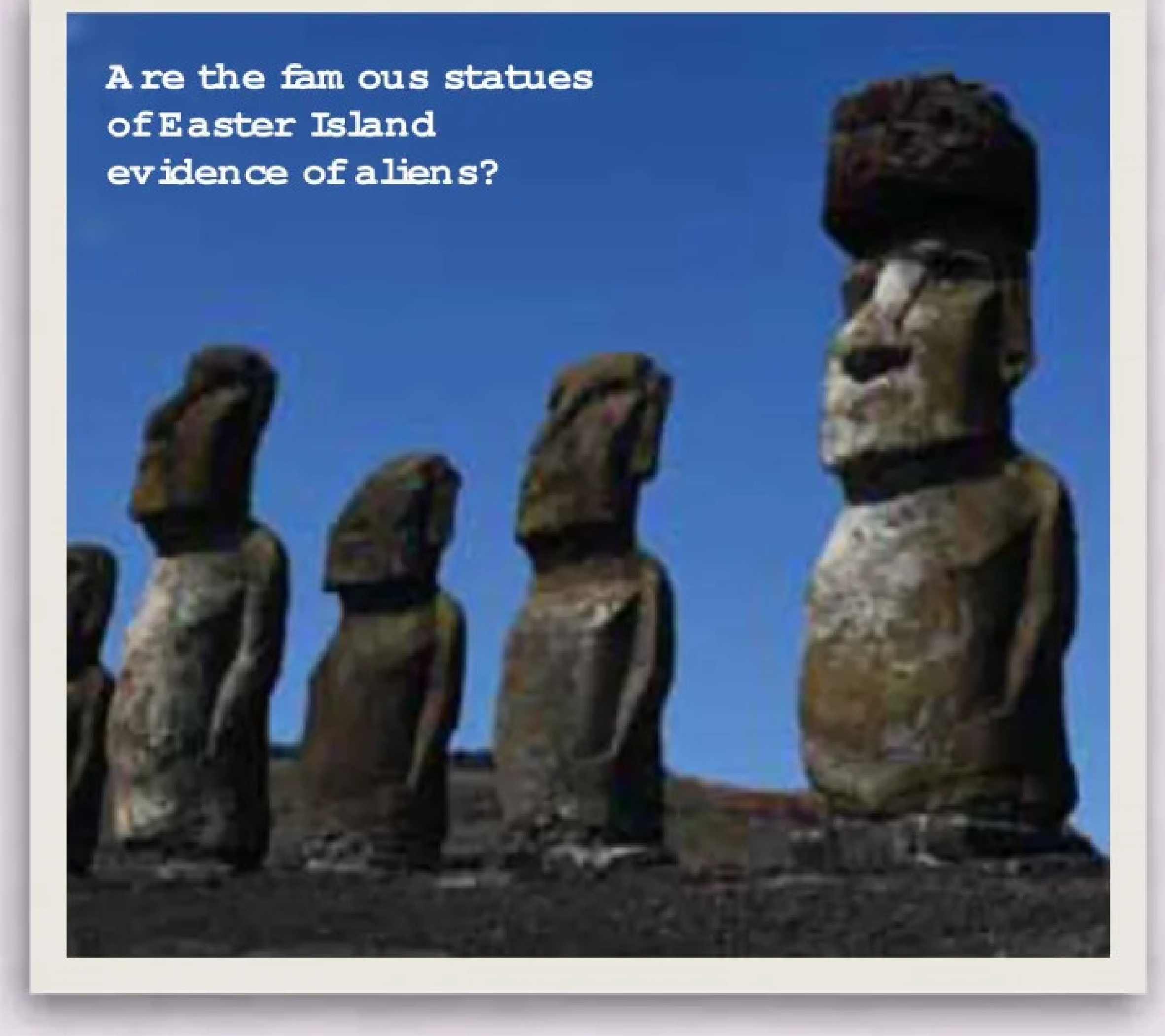
More recent evidence of potential alien encounters can be found in Domenico Ghirlandaio's 15th-century masterpiece The Madonna with Saint Giovannino. While the Virgin Mary prays in the foreground, a man and his dog can clearly be seen behind her looking skyward at a hovering disc-like object.

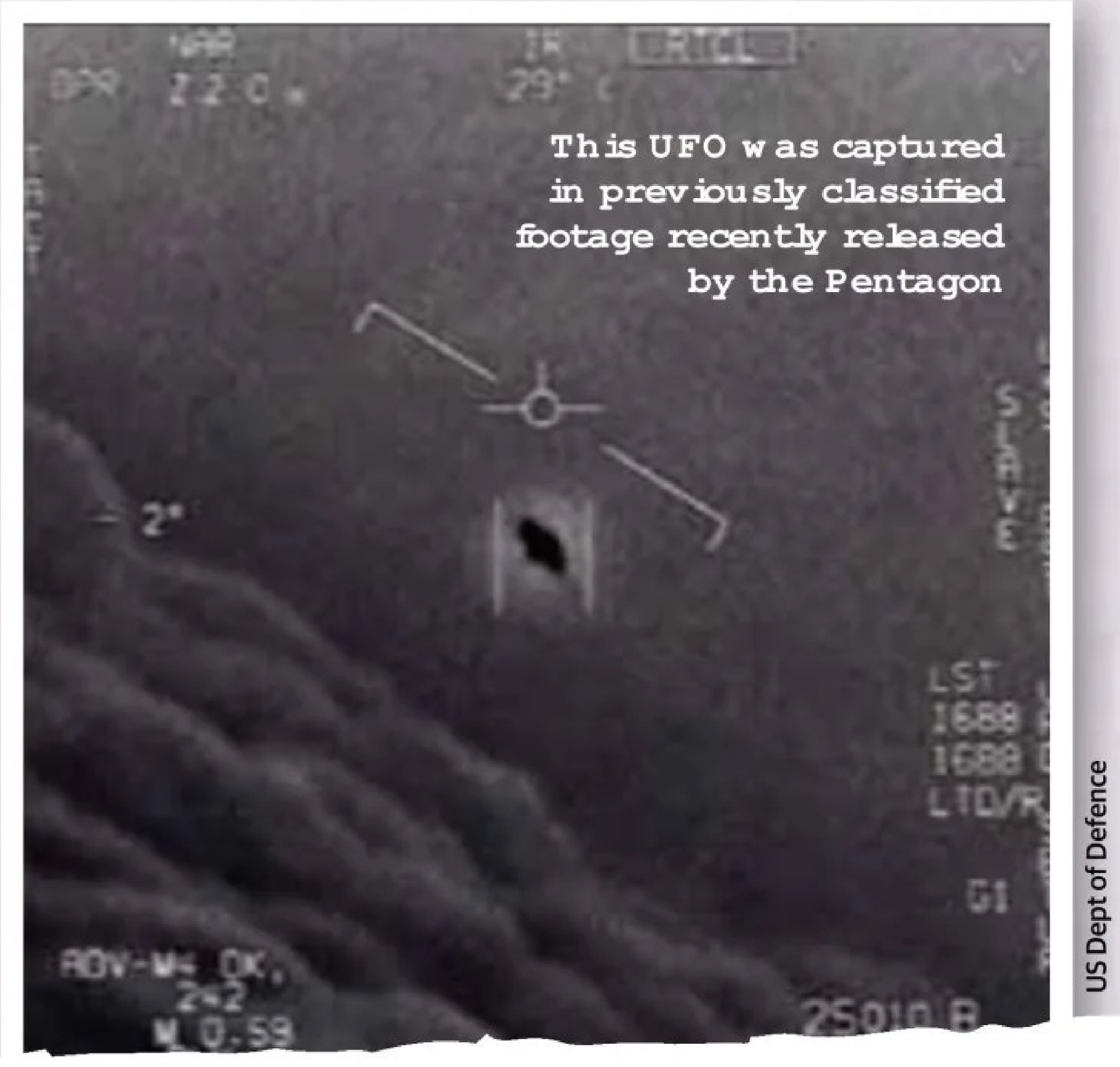
There is even a sighting noted in the Bible in The Book of Ezekiel. It claims that the prophet had a vision of a spaceship used by an advanced race to travel to Earth.

UFO researchers have also pointed to architectural evidence of alien life. The Maya pyramids found in the ancient city of Chichén Itzá in Mexico are believed to have been built with the help of aliens, who are said to have then used the pyramids as markers for landing their vessels. Some theorists even go so far as to claim that the pyramids emit powerful energy beams that would have enabled the ancient Maya to communicate with these extraterrestrials.

Further south, carved into the sands of the Nazca Desert, are a series of strange lines that some believe to be the work of UFOs. Many of them are shaped like animals or plants, while others are simply straight lines or more elaborate geometric shapes. Etched across 193 square miles, some of the lines stretch to 200 metres in length. Historians believe them to be the work of native people between 500 BCE and 500 CE, but others are certain the lines served an other-wordly purpose. According to Swiss author Erich von Däniken, the lines helped to delineate an extraterrestrial airfield used by aliens thousands of years ago. →

Wikiepdia, Diego Delso / CC BY-SA


Are the famous statues of Easter Island evidence of aliens?



This UFO was captured in previously classified footage recently released by the Pentagon

US Dept of Defence

TOP SECRET
CLASSIFIED

THE PENTAGON TAPES

In a rare move, the US government has released footage of ‘unexplained aerial phenomena’

In April 2020 US authorities unexpectedly granted the release of three videos that appear to show UFOs moving at remarkable speed. Previously leaked in 2007 and 2017, the footage was taken in 2004 and 2015 during US Air Force training flights. The most convincing video was shot in 2004 and features two fighter pilots tracing a rotating saucer-like object as it accelerates over the Pacific Ocean. "Look at that thing, dude!" exclaims one of the pilots. "It's rotating!" Another video reveals a pilot's attempt to lock onto and trace a rapidly moving UFO zipping above a body of water. Initially it evades the camera, such is its speed. A pilot can clearly be heard asking, "What the f*** is that?!" A second voice then says "Oh my gosh, what the hell is that man?!" The final clip shows a bright white light that seems to hover before darting out of view.

The Pentagon has explained that it released the footage in an effort to "clear up any misconceptions by the public on whether or not the footage that has been circulating was real".

The Pyramids of Giza and the Moai statues of Easter Island are also regularly cited as ancient evidence of UFOs helping humans to shape incredible constructions that many believe would have been beyond the means of mankind at the time. With such a widespread array of weird and wonderful creations, it is easy to determine why many see the hand of intelligent alien life in what are most likely ingenious – but very human – monumental projects.

FRIEND OR FOE?

Regardless of whether or not you subscribe to the view that the aforementioned events and landmarks are the workings of aliens, what is beyond doubt is that flashing lights and ornate buildings are benign evidence of UFOs, if they are in fact evidence at all. But not all reports of intergalactic encounters are quite so convivial.

Sometimes labelled the 'abduction phenomenon', reports of aliens kidnapping unsuspecting humans have been made since the 1960s, when Barney and Betty Hill of New Hampshire, US, claimed to have been spirited away by UFOs (see boxout for more on their experience). Many of the people who have purported to have been snatched by aliens described being examined or experimented on.

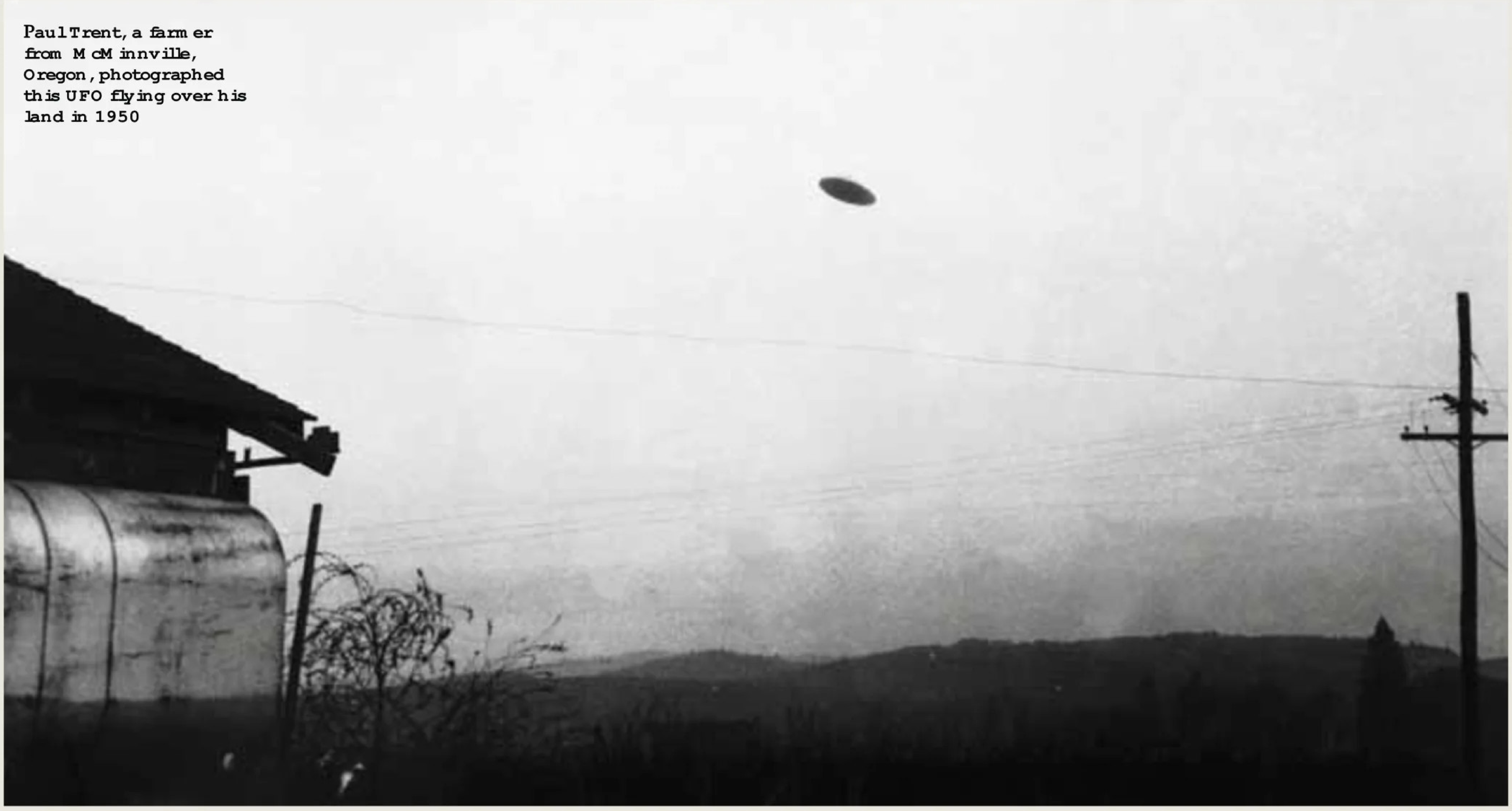
Mayan pyramids found in the ancient city of Chichén Itzá in Mexico are believed to have been built with the help of aliens

In October 1989, Steve and Dawn Hess travelled into the Mojave Desert for what they hoped would be a few peaceful days in their camper van. But their escape into the wild apparently turned into a nightmare when aliens descended on the couple and began to toy with their minds using telepathy. In later interviews Dawn explained that they were hypnotised, and while trapped in their trances they were told that a supreme galactic leader wanted to live in harmony with humans and bring together five galaxies. In order to achieve this aliens were being sent to Earth to intervene and stop mankind from destroying it.

An arguably even more outlandish claim to abduction was made in 1994 by Meng Zhaoguo of China. While walking through Red Flag Forest in Heilongjiang, China's most northern province, Zhaoguo saw an unusual object drift down among the trees. Drawn to it out of curiosity, Zhaoguo soon regretted his decision to investigate, for the aliens were equally intrigued by him. According to Zhaoguo the aliens within the aircraft began to harass him, routinely dragging him back to their mothership to copulate with them and even whisking him off to Mars. Unsurprisingly, many in China were not entirely convinced by Zhaoguo's account, as is often the case with any reports of alien abduction, something that Harvard psychiatrist John Mack believes is unfair: "Every other culture in history except this one, in the human race, has believed there were other entities, other intelligences in the universe… Why do we treat people like they are crazy, humiliate them, if they're experiencing some other intelligence?"

But if aliens really are kidnapping humans, what could they hope to gain by doing so? Are they delivering a message to us? For decades it has been said that warnings have accompanied many abductions. Perhaps their intentions are far from peaceful. Professor Stephen Hawking was very clear in his opinion on what the arrival of extraterrestrial life would mean for mankind. "If aliens ever visit us, I think the outcome would be much as when Christopher Columbus first landed in America, which didn't turn out very well for the Native Americans," he said in 2010. "A civilisation reading one of our messages could be billions of years ahead of us. If so, they will be vastly more powerful, and may not see us as any more valuable than we see bacteria."

According to esteemed physicist Brian Cox, it is "inconceivable that there will not be life and I think civilisations out there among the stars". If Professor Hawking was right, perhaps we should all be grateful that super-advanced alien overlords have to date refrained from making their presence known to all but a few humans.



Paul Trent, a farmer from McMinnville, Oregon, photographed this UFO flying over his land in 1950

Image source: Getty Images

LOST IN SPACE: THE JUDICA-CORDIGLIA TAPES

Did two amateur radio enthusiasts uncover a chilling Soviet conspiracy that doomed cosmonauts to death?

WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

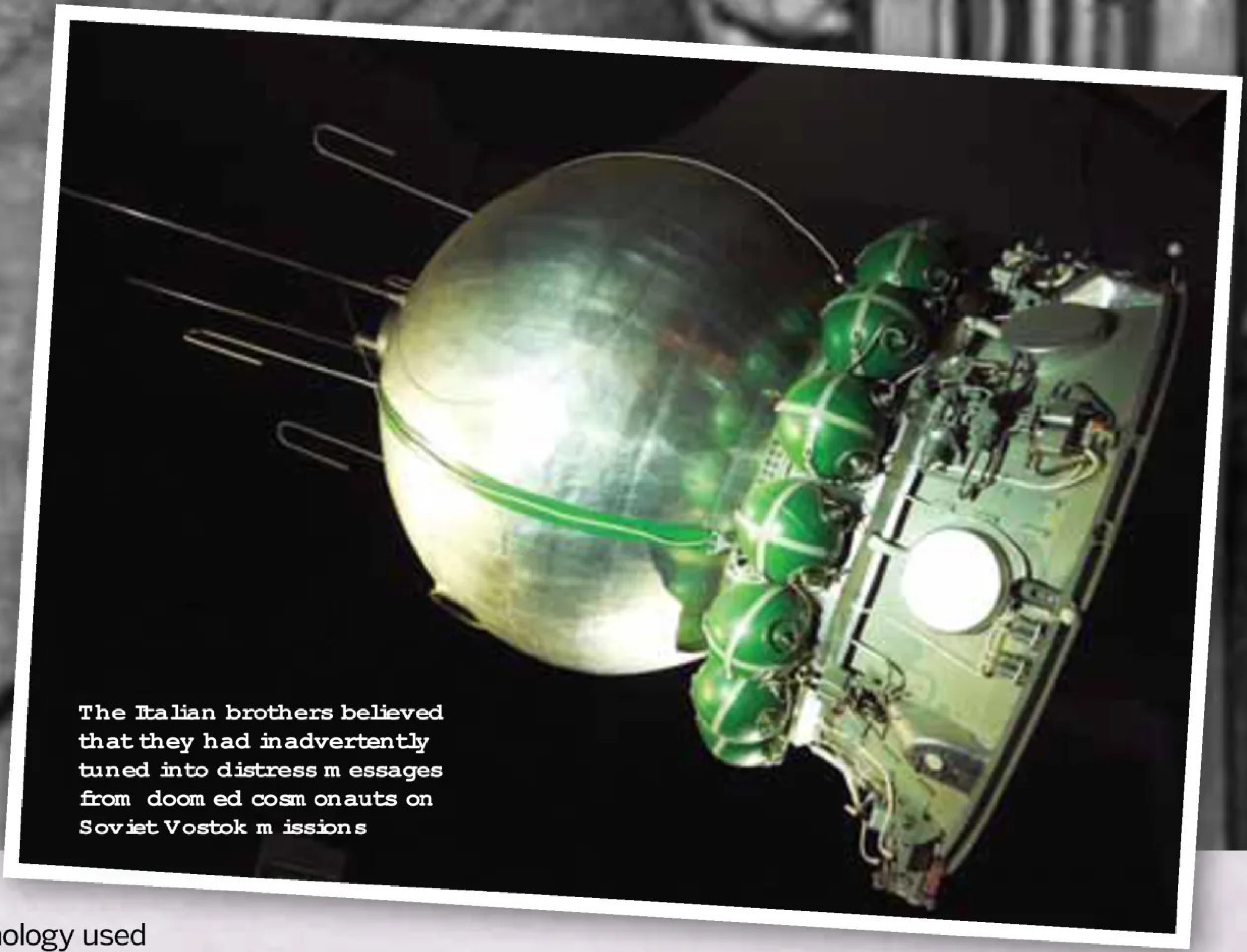
In the early 1960s, brothers Achille and Giovanni Judica-Cordiglia were busy indulging their love of amateur radio operation, a pastime that offered new and exciting possibilities to listen in as humanity made its first trips into outer space. The brothers had established a listening station near Turin that allowed them to listen in to Soviet and Russian transmissions, offering a glimpse of the very frontiers of technological achievement.

What they didn't expect was to hear a series of transmissions that seemed to reveal that Soviet cosmonauts were dying in space, but when they released recordings taken over a period of five years, that's exactly what they claimed to have experienced. From suffocation to fiery death on re-entry, cosmonauts trapped in never-ending orbit and lost craft bouncing off the atmosphere and into oblivion, the list they assembled was like something from a horror film. Their recordings apparently captured SOS morse code signals sent by doomed Russian explorers with no hope of rescue. If they are real, the fate and identity of those whose final moments of communication were captured by the amateur radio fans remains unknown.

Whilst cosmonauts such as Yuri Gagarin became heroes for their successfully space missions, some believe that others were far less fortunate.

> "When the brothers came forward their story captured the imagination of a horrified public, but the scientific community was a little more sceptical"

When two amateur radio operator brothers picked up mysterious transmissions, they uncovered one of the greatest mysteries of the space race



The Italian brothers believed that they had inadvertently tuned into distress messages from doomed cosmonauts on Soviet Vostok missions

When the brothers came forward their story captured the imagination of a horrified public, but the scientific community was a little more sceptical. Those who studied the tapes have pointed out a litany of revealing mistakes, which seem to cast doubt on the authenticity of the recordings. Amongst their criticisms are the fact that none of the cosmonauts use messaging protocols that would be standard practice for members of the Soviet air force. Likewise, the terminology used is sometimes incorrect, and when Russian is spoken, neither the grammar nor accent is that of a native speaker. Perhaps most damning of all, despite the speakers saying that they have lost control of their crafts and will be lost in deep space, the crafts concerned were not capable of achieving this feat, either deliberately or due to a malfunction. Of course, conspiracy theories have pointed out that this could simply be what Soviet Russia wanted people to think. Whilst the tapes made the Judica-Cordiglia brothers into celebrities, their authenticity remains the subject of heated debate, but the thought of lost cosmonauts hurtling out into deep space, abandoned and disowned by their government, is a chilling one indeed. If they are fake, it is a hoax that taps into a primal fear; little wonder it continues to fascinate today.

СТРУКЦИИ ДЛЯ УПОТРЕБЛЕНИЯ ШИФРОВАЛЬНЫХ БЛОКНОТОВ

АНИЕ БЛОКНОТОВ. Текст на страницах блокнотов
из случайно подобранных пятизначных чисел, которые
тся ключевыми группами. Цифры этих чисел употребляются
шифрования и расшифрования сообщений. Края блокнота
ным бумагой со всех четырех сторон, чтобы непосвященные
не могли рассматривать страниц блокнота без вашего
а. Каждый блокнот приготовляется в двух экземплярах.
ием распоряжении будут подлинники одних и копии других
нотов. Подлинник (зашиф) употребляется для зашифрования
одящих сообщений, а копия (расшиф) для расшифрования
одящих сообщений.

. ПРОСТОЙ ЦИФРОВОЙ ТЕКСТ. Открытый текст сообщения
жен сначала быть переведен в цифровые заменители, и
только после этого вы можете использовать ключевой текст
блокнота для зашифрования вашего сообщения. Перевод
производится посредством замены каждой буквы открытого
текста цифрой согласно нижеприведенной таблицы № 1.
Текст, состоящий из цифровых заменителей, называется
текстом". Например, слово "СЕНТЯБРЬ"

С Е Н Т Я Б Р
18 06 14 19 32 02 17

61740

CI 637
Reg. 2

10523

CI 626
Reg. 1

SECRET SIGNALS

Hidden inconspicuously amid the static are some mysterious transmissions – but what are they for? And who is behind them?

WRITTEN BY **JACQUELINE SNOWDEN**

Tune a shortwave radio just right and you may be able to pick up some bizarre broadcasts. Strings of Morse code, sporadic snippets of music, a lone voice reading a series of random numbers… these curious communications may not make any sense to the casual listener, but they are quite possibly delivering important information to someone.

Many of these mysterious frequencies are known as numbers stations. While they never announce themselves, and no governments or intelligence agencies claim to run them, it is widely accepted that these stations are sending coded messages to spies. This is not as outlandish an explanation as it may seem. Shortwave radio may be comparatively low-tech in the internet age, but it's a reliable method of one-way communication over long distances. Digital activity can be monitored or traced relatively easily, but with numbers stations the intended recipient of a transmission is anonymous.

> Some believe that organised crime gangs may use the same tech

Operatives receiving these messages would likely decode them using one-time pads, code sheets that only the sender and receiver have. These lists of random digits work with a specific key to translate the number sequence into the intended message (for example, at a very basic level the key could be 1=A). Once that message was transmitted or deciphered, both the sender and receiver would destroy their key, leaving no trace of the means to decode the message. Every single message uses a new, randomly generated key – for all intents and purposes, the system is uncrackable. It's possible that these secret radio signals aren't exclusively used by intelligence agencies. Some believe that organised crime gangs may use the same technology to coordinate smuggling operations and other illegal activities.

It makes for uneasy eavesdropping to know that you won't be the only person listening in on a numbers station. Here are just some of the spooky spy signals that have infiltrated the public airwaves.

Image Source: Getty Images.

THE BUZZER

Are the broadcasts of this secretive Russian station just a defunct Cold War relic, or are they something more sinister?

Somewhere in north-western Russia, transmitters have been broadcasting a series of repetitive beeps and buzzes almost continuously since at least the early 1980s. The regularity and reliability of the unexplained signal fascinated the small community of shortwave radio enthusiasts who stumbled across it. With the rise of the internet, access to the signal via online sources gained the transmission thousands more captivated fans. Despite growing interest in the signals, their origin and true purpose are still a mystery.

The station initially transmitted intermittent beeps and went by the call sign UVB-76. In 1992, the beeps inexplicably changed to buzzes, firing once every two to three seconds, all day and all night. Through the crackling airwaves, the buzzes sound almost like a ghostly foghorn.

Occasionally, the buzzing would be interrupted by a male voice reading out a random series of numbers, words spelled in the phonetic alphabet, and sometimes names as well. The Buzzer – as it unofficially became known – would sometimes change pitch and frequency, but was seemingly unaffected by whatever upheavals engulfed Russia. Through the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Soviet Union, the Chechen wars and all the political manoeuvring within the Russian Federation, UVB-76 kept buzzing along.

Then on 5 June 2010, without warning or explanation, The Buzzer stopped buzzing. For the first time in decades, the station fell silent for approximately 24 hours, but went back to buzzing business as usual the next day. For the next few months the otherwise monotonous, metronome-like transmissions were occasionally interrupted by Morse code, distorted voice recordings and two more brief signal blackouts.

On 23 August 2010, UVB-76 got even stranger. The buzzing stopped and a clear voice announced: "UVB-76, UVB-76 – 93 882 NAIMINA 74 14 35 74 – 9, 3, 8, 8, 2, Nikolai, Anna, Ivan, Michail, Ivan, Nikolai, Anna, 7, 4, 1, 4, 3, 5, 7, 4." Enthusiasts assumed these were coordinates, which translate to the middle of the Barents Sea (between Scandinavia, Svalbard and north-western Russia). And perhaps their decryptions were right – the Russian military perform missile tests in those remote waters.

The rise of the internet saw a resurgence in interest in these cryptic broadcasts

Years active: 1970s/80s – present

Despite much speculation, nobody knows the precise location of The Buzzer's current source

The Buzzer resumed, but for the next couple of days those tuning in overheard what sounded like someone shuffling around or knocking things. There was an open microphone in whatever room the signal was being broadcast from, and someone or something was definitely there. But, despite much anticipation among eavesdroppers, there was no 'man behind the curtain' reveal.

Over the following few weeks there were several more interruptions – this time, they were musical interludes. Listeners overheard short extracts of Tchaikovsky's 'Danse des Petits Cygnes' ('Dance of the Little Swans') from Swan Lake between the drones. Then, on 7 September 2010, a male voice broke The Buzzer's vocal silence once again. The mysterious announcer declared the signal's new call sign: "Mikhail Dmitri Zhenya Boris" or MDZhB. One of the most famous transmissions among Buzzer enthusiasts occurred several years later in 2013, when a male voice ominously stated "Ob'yavila komanda 135" ('Command 135 announced/initiated'). Rare interruptions such as these have raised more questions than answers, adding to the intrigue surrounding the station's raison d'être.

Radio enthusiasts and conspiracy theorists alike have spent many years pondering the purpose of these transmissions. Some think it's a long-forgotten Soviet-era military communication facility, still functioning but no longer in use. Others wonder if it could be part of an ominous 'dead hand' system – a relic of the Cold War designed to launch an automatic counter-attack should the US annihilate the Russian capital with a nuclear bomb.

A less dramatic hypothesis is that MDZhB is part of a scientific experiment to study parts of the Earth's atmosphere. A paper published in 2008 in the Russian Journal of Earth Sciences (entitled 'Information-measuring complex and

TRANSCEIVER
GAIN
FUNCTION
PA LOAD

database of mid-latitude Borok Geophysical Observatory') describes the use of 4,625kHz – the same frequency as The Buzzer – as a carrier wave to investigate the ionosphere with Doppler radio sounding. This requires a constant signal to be broadcast into the atmosphere at a specific known frequency. Perhaps this is all an elaborate cover story to conceal The Buzzer's true purpose, or perhaps those running the station are killing two birds with one stone; a scientific application is not necessarily mutually exclusive from another, more clandestine one. The leading theory, however, is that The Buzzer is a numbers station that is only occasionally activated to transmit secure messages to the Russian military. In which case, the persistent buzzing between the mysterious coded messages is likely to be a way of keeping the frequency occupied so that it can't be used by used by other parties for different purposes. This remains speculation – the Russian government has never admitted to owning or running the station.

Besides the enigma of the signal's perpetual buzz and intermittent codes, the whereabouts of its transmitter has also sparked interest. Numbers station enthusiasts have tried to triangulate its exact position without success, but attempts to trace the signal's source have yielded estimates. Initially, The Buzzer seemed to be coming from a now-abandoned military base in Povarovo, north-west of Moscow. However, after the strange messages in August 2010, the transmitter's apparent location changed, moving away from Moscow and north-west towards St Petersburg. It migrated to the city of Pskov near the Estonian border, suggesting that the strange broadcasts that summer may have been part of the source switchover. The Russian military underwent a structural reorganisation around the same time, with a new command centre being established at St Petersburg. This provided more evidence – if only circumstantial – for MDZhB having some form of military link.

In January 2016, the callsign changed to ZhUOZ, and in January 2019 it changed yet again. Now, various ones are used. The most commonly used sign is ANVF, although 2170, VZhCh, A1JZH and LNR4 have also been used, amongst others. ZhUOZ has not been abandoned, though.

The Buzzer has accumulated a cult-like following, with dedicated listeners tuning in to its almost hypnotic drones, recording its every announcement and debating what it could possibly mean. But each coded transmission or random interruption just raises more questions; the case of The Buzzer only gets only gets curiouser and curiouser.

THE BUZZER'S SISTER STATIONS

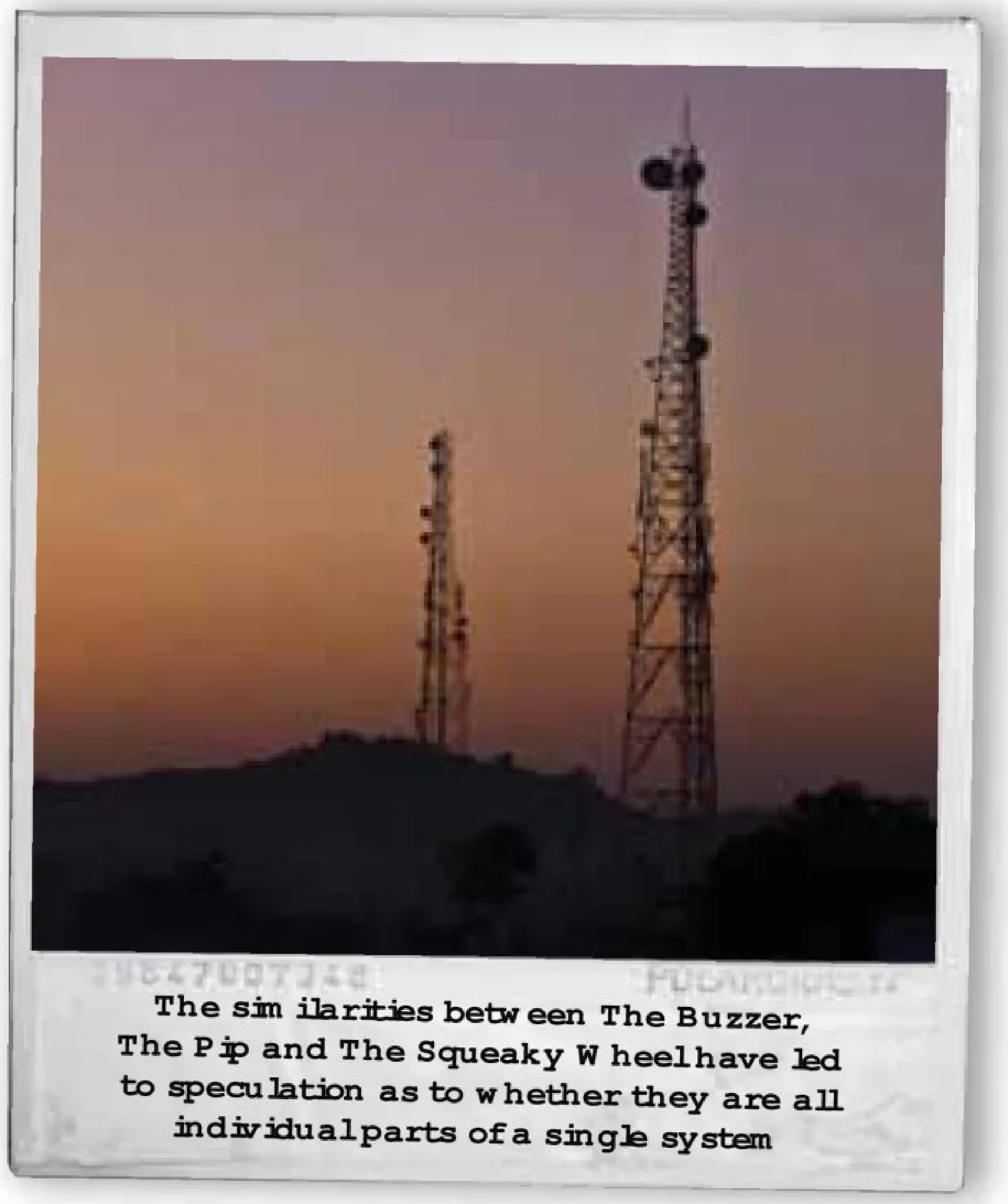
MDZhB isn't the only unsettling signal being broadcast from Russia

Two other shortwave broadcasts have some striking similarities to the infamous Buzzer, known as The Pip and The Squeaky Wheel.

The Pip has been active since at least 1986 and broadcasts regular monotonous, electronic beeps all day, every day. It is occasionally interrupted by coded voice messages before the pips resume.

The Squeaky Wheel has been broadcasting since at least 2000 and its original interval sign was repeated 'squeaks' of two different tones. However, in 2008 it changed to two tones of electronic beeps, no longer sounding particularly like its namesake.

Both stations differ from The Buzzer in that they switch between two frequencies, one for daytime broadcasts and another for nighttime. Some avid listeners suggest that the three stations are linked somehow; perhaps part of the same system for domestic military communications. But only its operators and the signals' intended recipients know for sure.



The similarities between The Buzzer, The Pip and The Squeaky Wheel have led to speculation as to whether they are all individual parts of a single system

THE LINCOLNSHIRE POACHER

How a jaunty English folk song became synonymous with British espionage

Years active: 1970s – 2008

Royal Air Force
AKROTIRI

Radio direction detecting equipment suggested that the RAF Akrotiri base was the source of the infamous Lincolnshire Poacher broadcasts

One of the most famous numbers stations was the Lincolnshire Poacher. This strange station got its name from a traditional English folk song, the first few bars of which were used to bookend each broadcast. The melody was eerily played out several times as the signal's interval sign, produced by what sounds like a synthesised calliope instrument.

In every communication, once the tune ended, a recording of a woman with an upper-class British accent repeated a five-number sequence. It's thought that this code was to identify the intended recipient of the subsequent message, which would follow after three chimes. The main messages consisted of a long series of numbers (always 200 groups of five-digit figures), which took around 45 minutes to deliver in full.

These communications would take place every day between noon and 10pm (UTC). It's thought that the regularity of the broadcasts added an extra layer of secrecy. Transmitting on a regular schedule and sending messages of the same length each time meant that nothing was given away. If messages were typically five minutes long, but out of the blue an hour-long broadcast was made, it would indicate to anyone listening in that something was afoot. Consistency gave the impression that nothing was out of the ordinary, regardless of whether the coded content was nothing to report, or a vital mission.

With specialised radio direction finding equipment, avid Lincolnshire Poacher eavesdroppers hoping to find its transmission source claimed to have tracked it to the RAF Akrotiri base in Cyprus. It's believed to have been used by British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) to broadcast messages to agents based across the Middle East, but this theory has never been confirmed by the intelligence agency.

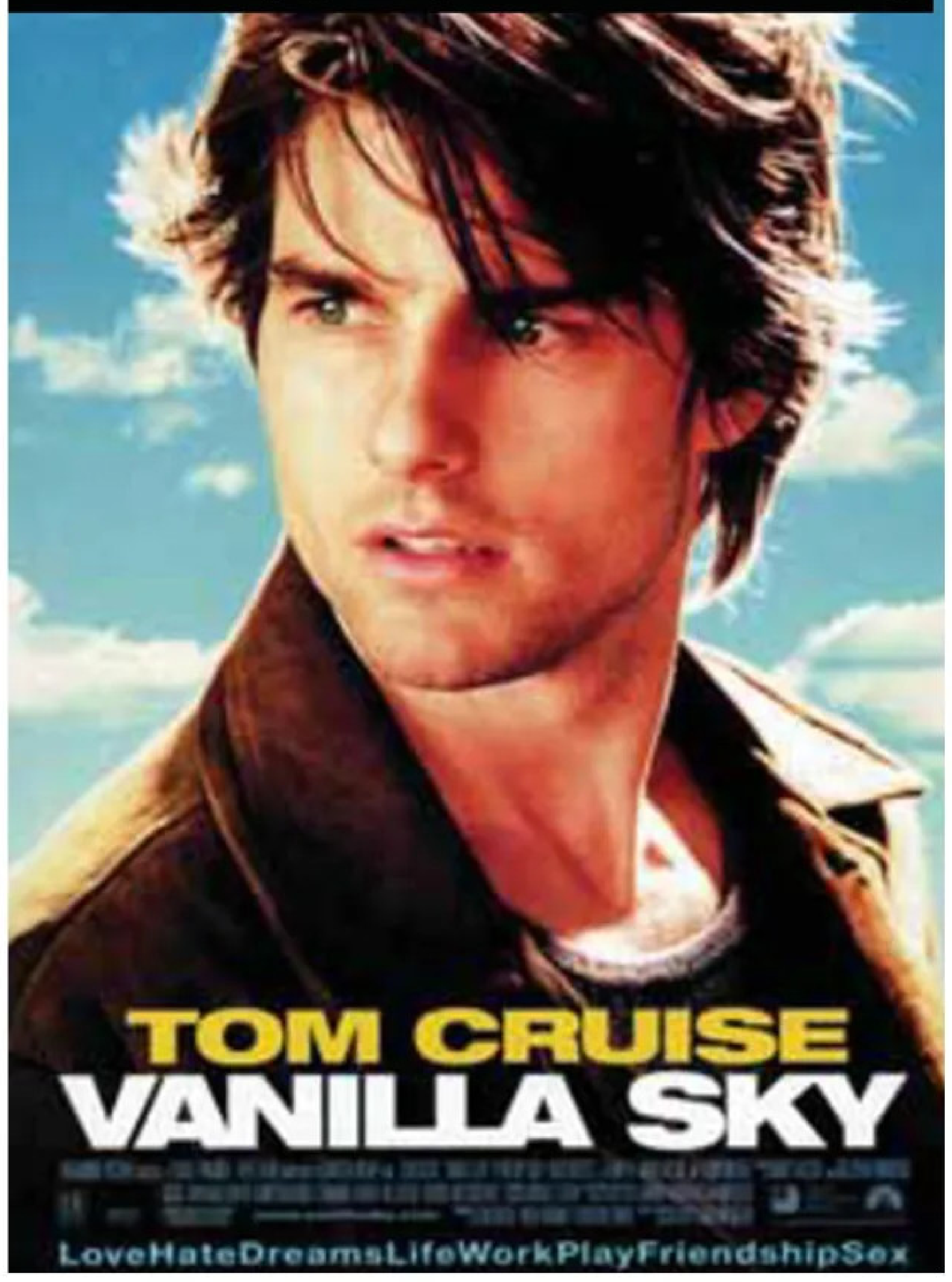
A very similar station known as Cherry Ripe was thought to have been broadcast from Guam, before being moved to Australia's Northern Territory. The only major difference was Cherry Ripe's interval sign – a synthesised version of the English folk song of the same name. Apart from that, it followed the same format, with announcements made by the same voice, so presumably it too was run by MI6. The Lincolnshire Poacher stopped in June 2008 and Cherry Ripe about 18 months later.

THE CONET PROJECT

Discover the greatest hits collection of spy radio in an extensive archive of cloak-and-dagger broadcasts

In 1997, a four-CD compilation of the obscure recordings from numbers stations was released by the record label Irdial Discs. The 150 different station samples were put together by numbers station aficionado Akin Fernandez, who'd been captivated by the bizarre broadcasts since he discovered them while browsing the airwaves in 1992. The name, 'The Conet Project', came from the frequent use of the word 'conet' (Czech for 'end') in many of the broadcasts. It was rereleased as a five-disc edition in 2013 with one-time pad samples. At the time, the CDs – and the accompanying booklet that speculated about each transmission's purpose – were a niche product among shortwave radio enthusiasts. With the internet age, however, it became easier for information about these broadcasts to be shared and their popularity grew to cult status. The increased interest in these mystery transmissions led to a UK Government spokesperson addressing the issue: "People shouldn't be mystified by them," she told the *Daily Telegraph* in 2008. "They're not, shall we say, for public consumption." It's the closest thing to an admission from an official source regarding a numbers station that there has ever been.

Audio extracts from The Conet Project have been used in popular culture, including the 2001 psychological thriller Vanilla Sky



OTHER RADIO STATIONS

SWEDISH RHAPSODY

Years active: 1950s – 1998
Suspected source/origin: Poland

An ice cream truck melody and the disembodied voice of a little girl reciting coded messages in German made for one of the creepiest numbers stations on the airwaves. It used a tune from Swedish Rhapsody No. 1 by Swedish composer Hugo Alfvén as an interval sign.

YOSEMITE SAM

Years active: 2004 – present
Suspected source/origin: New Mexico, US

This baffling signal consists of a short 'buzz' of a compressed data burst lasting 0.8 seconds, followed by a clip of the cartoon character Yosemite Sam shouting "Varmint, I'mma gonna blow you to smithereens!" – a quote from an episode of Bugs Bunny, Bunker Hill Bunny, that was first broadcast in 1949.

THE CUBAN BABBLER

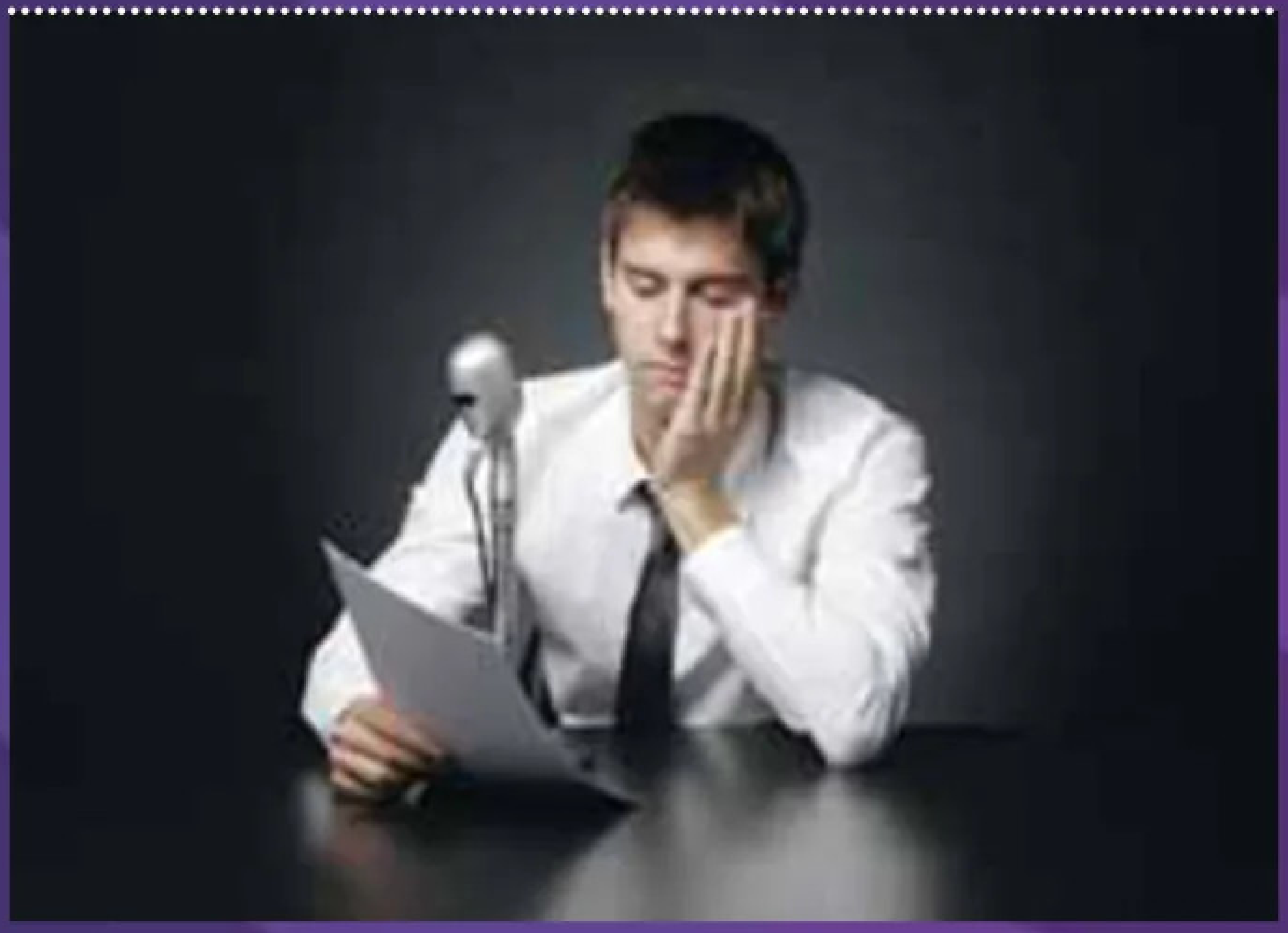
Years active: Unknown – 2016
Suspected source/origin: Cuba

This station earned its nickname from its bizarre delivery style. The announcers on The Cuban Babbler didn't read strings of code, they sang them – fast – to what seemed to be improvised melodies. Have pity on the intended recipient trying to copy the message down!

THE BORED MAN

Years active: Unknown – 1998
Suspected source/origin: Cuba

The Bored Man sounded as disinterested in his role as announcer as his nickname suggests. He would often get things wrong and have to backtrack or restart transmissions to correct himself. Sometimes listeners overheard laughter in the background during his broadcasts.



MOSSAD

Years active: 1960s/70s – 2011
Suspected source/origin: Israel

Unlike most other numbers stations, the signal nicknamed Mossad mostly used NATO phonetic letters rather than numbers. Samples from this station's messages were used by the American band Wilco on their record 'Yankee Hotel Foxtrot', and also inspired the album title.

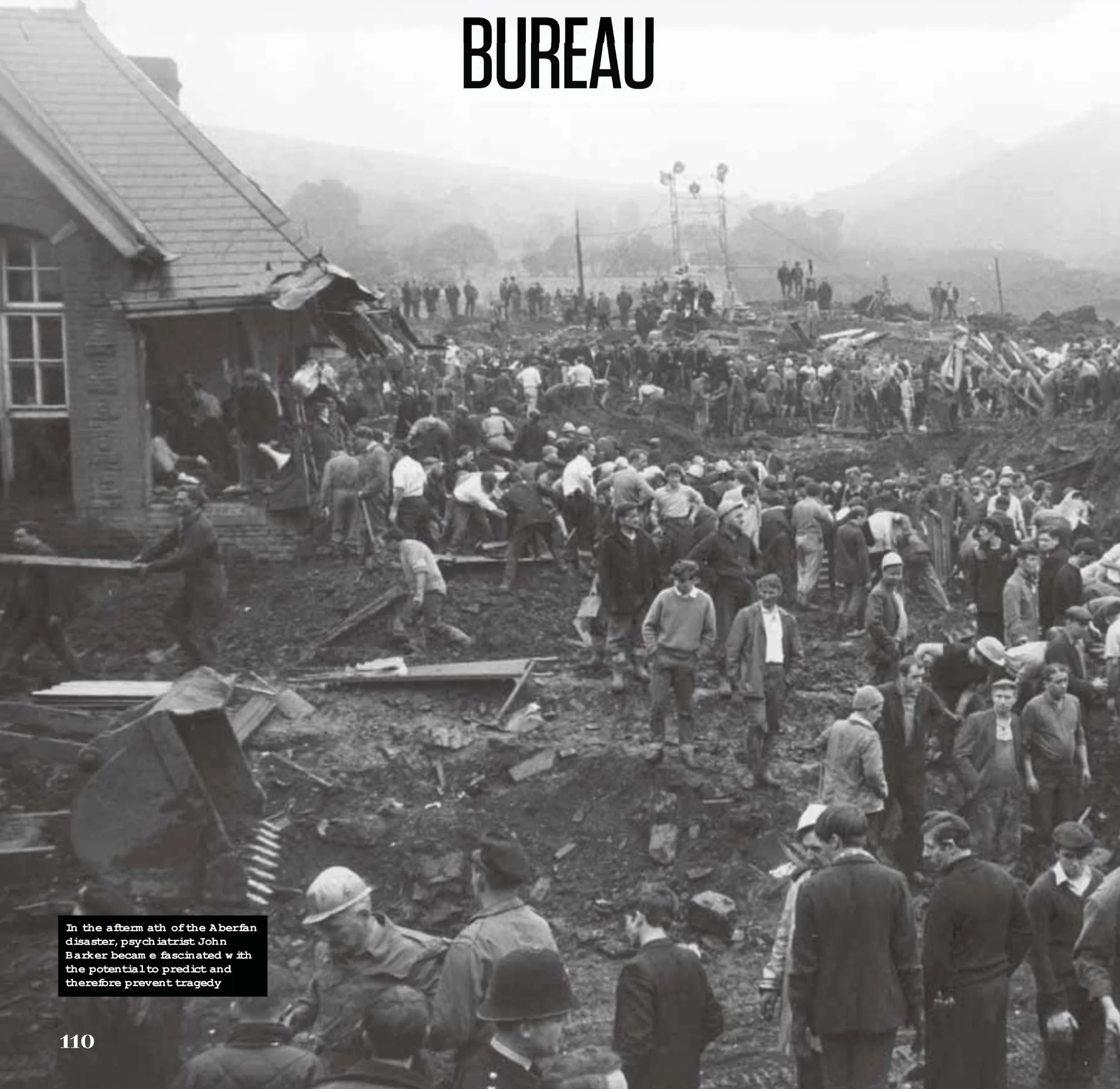
H
HOTEL

F
FOXTROT

Y
YANKEE

Image Source: Getty Images.

THE PREMONITIONS BUREAU



In the aftermath of the Aberfan disaster, psychiatrist John Barker became fascinated with the potential to predict and therefore prevent tragedy

In the aftermath of the Aberfan disaster, a mysterious project began to investigate whether psychics could predict and prevent another tragedy

WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

The Aberfan disaster saw mining waste engulf a school in a Welsh village, killing 144 people

The tale of the Premonitions Bureau is one that seems to have leapt straight from the pages of fiction. Borne out of tragedy, steeped in mystery and ended by a death foretold, this so-far unmatched attempt to harness the power of the unknown stands at the very frontiers of psychical research. Yet as the experiment progressed, it soon became apparent that one prediction in particular may have hit a little too close to home.

On 21 October 1966, the colliery tip that towered over the Welsh village of Aberfan was fatally weakened by a prolonged period of heavy rainfall. As the villagers below went about their daily lives and children settled at their desks in Pantglas Junior School, the vast slurry tip suddenly began to shift and as it moved, it became a landslide. It was one of the worst industrial disasters Britain had ever experienced and the Aberfan disaster claimed 144 lives, including 116 children who had set off to school that morning for the last day of term.

As news spread of the disaster and desperate rescue efforts began, people began to converge on the little village from all over Britain. Driven by the shared horror and sorrow for the victims of Aberfan and their grieving families, all these volunteers knew was that they wanted to help, no matter how. One of those who travelled to Aberfan in the days immediately following the disaster was 42-year-old John Barker, a Cambridge-educated psychiatrist with a glittering career, who was employed at a mental health hospital in Shropshire. In his free time, Barker was a student of the paranormal and a member of the Society of Psychical Research. In fact, when he made the trip to Aberfan, he was writing a book about people who had accurately predicted their own deaths. His area of interest would come back to haunt him.

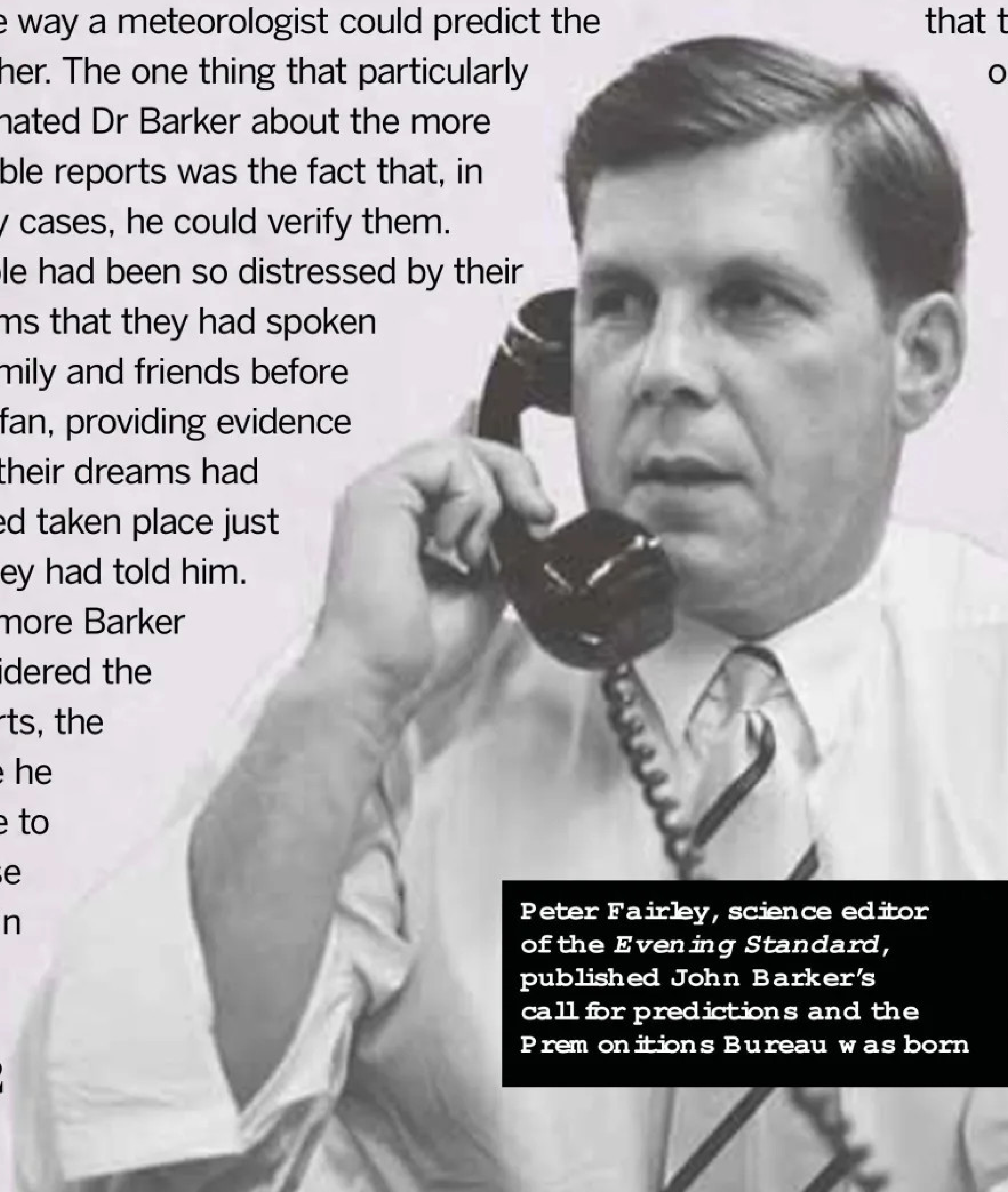
Barker arrived in Aberfan in the aftermath of the tragedy. When he did, he found that stories had already started to spring up amongst the villages that seemed to suggest that some of the children had accurately foretold the forthcoming disaster and, tragically, their own deaths. He learned that, just the day prior to the landslide, eight-year-old Paul Davies had drawn a picture of a crowd digging through a hillside. Above the scene, Paul had written "the end". Later, Barker would learn of a case in which another local child, ten-year-old Eryl Mai Jones, reported a dream she had had the previous evening to her mother.

She described arriving at her school only to find it gone. "Something black had come down all over it," she told her mother, bringing to mind an incident just a few days previously when she had commented, "I'm not afraid to die". Sadly, both Paul and Eryl Mai died when the tip collapsed.

Needing a wider sample than the shocked and grieving people of Aberfan could offer, Barker enlisted Peter Fairley, the *Evening Standard*'s science editor, to publish a call inviting readers to write in if they had experienced a dream of vision that predicted the tragedy at Aberfan. Less than 80 people replied, and of the few letters he received, many were vague or unreliable; others, however, such as that described in the case of Eryl Mai Jones, seemed chillingly prescient. Another correspondent, Carolyn Miller, reported a vision she had on 20 October, when she saw an avalanche of coal hurtling towards a child, followed by a vision of rescuers toiling in the wreckage. She was so unsettled by the vision that she shared it with her friends from church, adding that she had a strong sense that the child she saw had survived. A few days later she saw the little boy in a news report from the village: just as she predicted, he had survived.

> "The letters Barker received in response to his advert were enough to convince the psychiatrist that there was something more to explore"

The letters Barker received were enough to convince the psychiatrist that there was something more to explore. He theorised that, whenever something tragic was about to occur, that some people began to experience what he termed "pre-disaster syndrome". Essentially, they were somehow able to predict events in the same way a meteorologist could predict the weather. The one thing that particularly fascinated Dr Barker about the more credible reports was the fact that, in many cases, he could verify them. People had been so distressed by their dreams that they had spoken to family and friends before Aberfan, providing evidence that their dreams had indeed taken place just as they had told him. The more Barker considered the reports, the more he came to realise that in each case, though the dreamer had seen events that appeared to predict the Aberfan disaster, none of them had included the kind of information – such as location, date, time, or the names of people involved – that could have saved the victims. Barker was fascinated by the possibility that there could another stage of development in which these visions could be harnessed and somehow steered towards more precision in order to gain enough information to foretell and possibly even prevent the occurence of future tragedies.

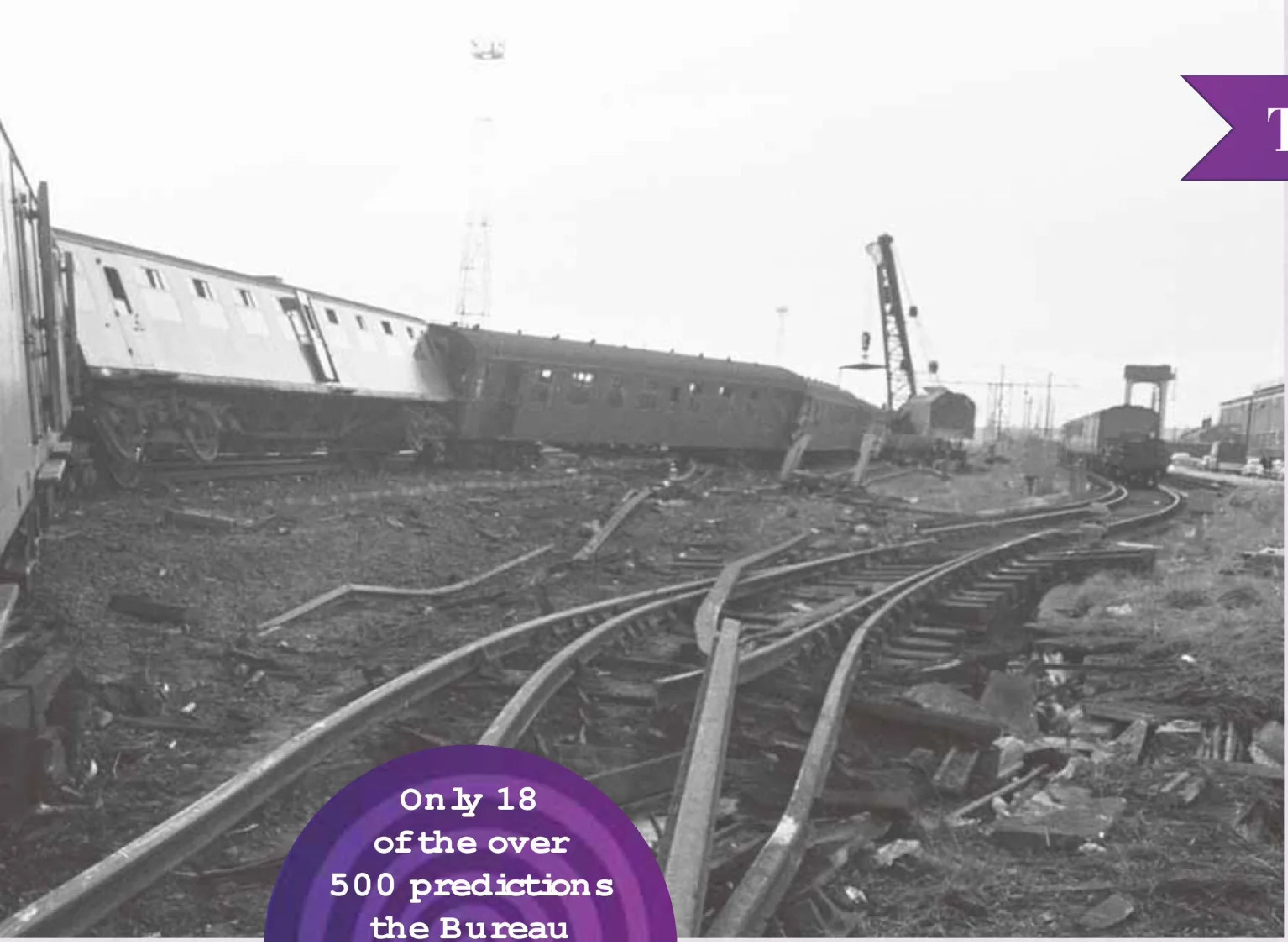


Peter Fairley, science editor of the *Evening Standard*, published John Barker's call for predictions and the Premonitions Bureau was born

Spurred on by their discoveries, as 1966 came to an end, Barker and Fairley began a project which they called the Premonitions Bureau. They invited readers of the *Evening Standard* to keep sending in their dreams, which would be noted, stamped with the date received and scored according to an 11 point system. Up to five points would be awarded for "unusualness", five for accuracy and one for timing. As the letters poured in, Barker and Fairley soon concluded that two people in particular stood out from the crowd. Scoring high across the board were 44-year-old Post Office telephonist Alan Hencher, whose premotions had started after he suffered a head injury, and Kathleen Middleton, a 52-year-old tutor of ballet and piano who would later claim to have had a lifelong ability to predict the future. In both cases, their reports of the disaster included details that had not been made available to the public, and Middleton had even woken on the night before the tragedy choking and unable to breathe.

The Premonition Bureau's most prominent seers predicted the fatal Hither Green train crash. Once again though, the visions proved too vague to prevent it

On 21 March 1967, Hencher telephoned Barker to describe a premonition he had just experienced. In it he saw an aeroplane plough into mountains in the Mediterranean, killing 123 or 124 people. The next month, a Bristol Britannia aircraft slammed into a hillside in Cyprus whilst attempting to land in bad weather. The accident killed 124 of the 126 people onboard. Later that year, Middleton and Hencher both predicted the Hither Green rail crash, which killed 49 people when the train derailed on a journey from Hastings to Charing Cross, whilst Middleton also appeared to predict everything from weather phenomena and Grand National winners to the assassination of Robert Kennedy. These



Only 18 of the over 500 predictions the Bureau collected were deemed to have ever come true

GLOBE AIR
HB-ITB

Two of Barker's star psychics seemed to predict the fatal crash of this Bristol Britannia aircraft in the hills below Nicosia

were, however, the exceptions to the rule – of nearly 500 predictions collected by the bureau, most didn't come true; Barker believed that 18 premotions had been accurate, and 12 of these were made by Hencher and Middleton. Barker was particularly occupied by the contradiction inherent in his research: if the predictions enabled the disasters to be prevented, then were they predictions at all? Even worse, did such clairvoyant visions and the fact that they lacked sufficient detail to report and prevent them, mean that the tragedies couldn't be prevented anyway, as they were predetermined whatever happened?

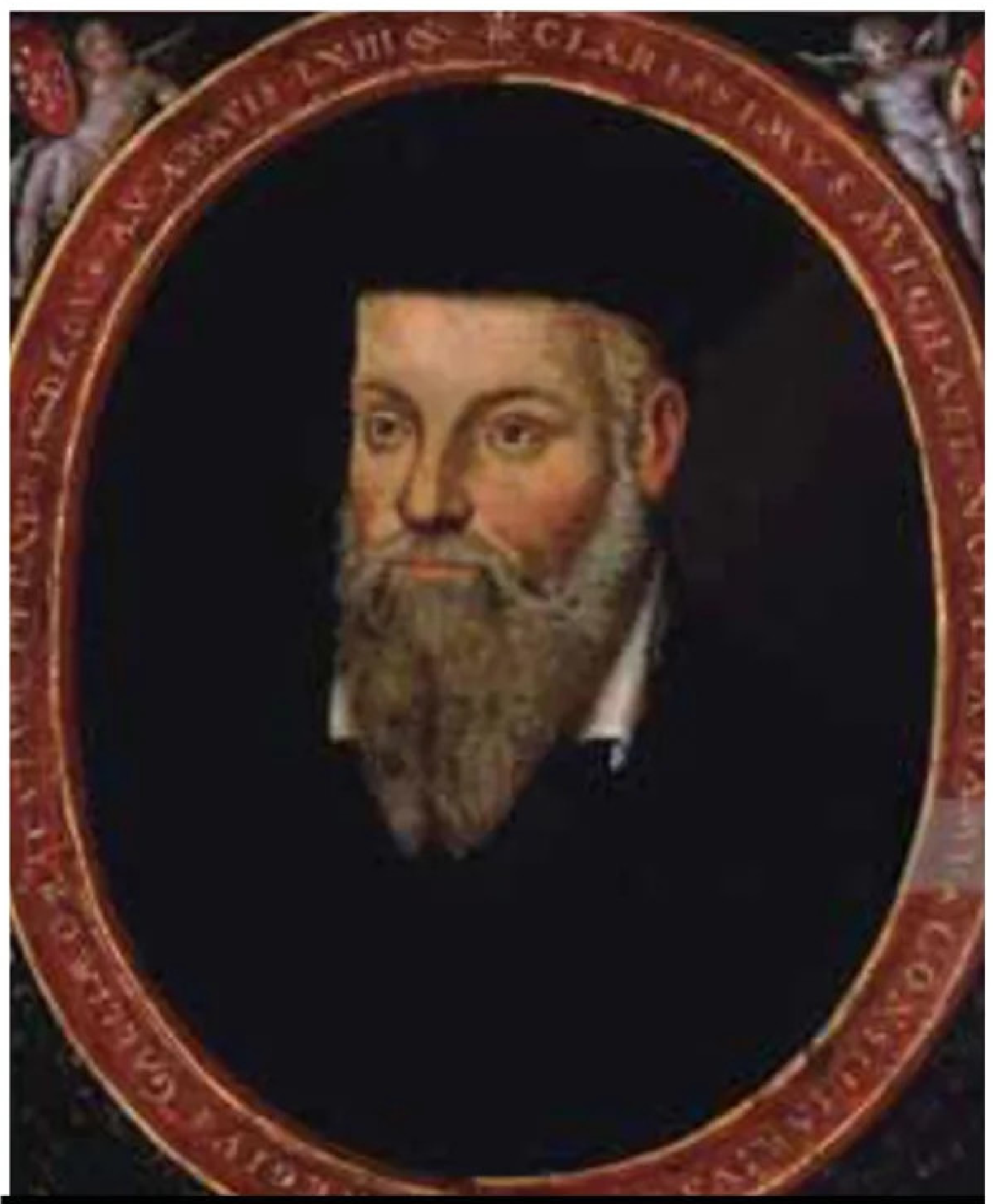
A year after the Predictions Bureau opened, Hencher and Middleton once again both predicted the same tragedy. Without any collaboration, the Bureau's stars had independently foreseen the imminent death of its co-creator, John Barker. Barker was both frightened and fascinated, recording pragmatically, "I suppose anybody who plays about with precognition … must accept what he gets." He died of a brain haemorrhage in August 1968, but was sure to leave behind a memo confirming that his star correspondents had predicted his imminent death.

With the death of Barker, the Premonitions Bureau seemed to have lost its driving force. It closed down before he and Fairley had been able to achieve their dream of officially placing their findings before Parliament and the British Medical Research Council. Whatever mysteries they might have decoded have been lost; though Barker suspected he was on the verge of harnessing the psychic powers of prediction, his research ended with his death, the very demise that the project he had founded and nurtured had foretold.

THE FUTURE FORETOLD

Throughout history, people have looked to mystics and psychics to tell them what the future held. Early seers such as the Oracle at Delphi were believed to have great powers of foresight and have passed into legend and myth. Perhaps the most famous historical seer is Nostradamus, a 16th century French apothecary who believers claim has foretold war, natural disaster and tragedy throughout the ages. His writings are still debated and studied today, and continue to attract believers and sceptics alike. For the former, Nostradamus' prophecies are coded references to some very specific events, whilst for the latter, his apparent powers of prophecy can be credited to nothing more than coincidence or misinterpretations of the original text.

More recently, Baba Vanga, a blind Bulgarian mystic, achieved fame for her powers of prediction in everything from celebrity deaths to American election results. She even accurately predicted the date of her own death from natural causes, 11 August 1996. Over the centuries, those who claim to predict the future have attracted awe and derision in equal measure. Whatever the truth of their abilities, one thing is certain: they will continue to fascinate us as we seek to delve deeper into the mysteries of the world in which we live.



Nostradamus is perhaps the most famous of all historical seers. Translations of his prophecies continue to attract new readers even five centuries after he lived

CAN YOU HEAR... THE HUM?

The mysterious, unexplainable noise that can be heard across the the globe

WRITTEN BY **POPPY-JAY ST PALMER**

Some of the world's most chilling mysteries are the things you cannot see, the things you cannot prove exist but know are there.

The Hum is one of them. The Hum is the unofficial name given to a mysterious, low-frequency noise that sits just on the cusp of human hearing. However, it is only heard by roughly four percent of the world's population.

Reports of the Hum have materialised around the globe, the earliest coming from the UK in the mid-1970s, when people began writing to the *Bristol Evening Post* to describe a strange noise

> "Hums have been blamed on tinnitus, jet streams, military radio waves, and even the human ears generating their own noises"

Mysterious sounds blamed on local factories often persist, even after the factories close down

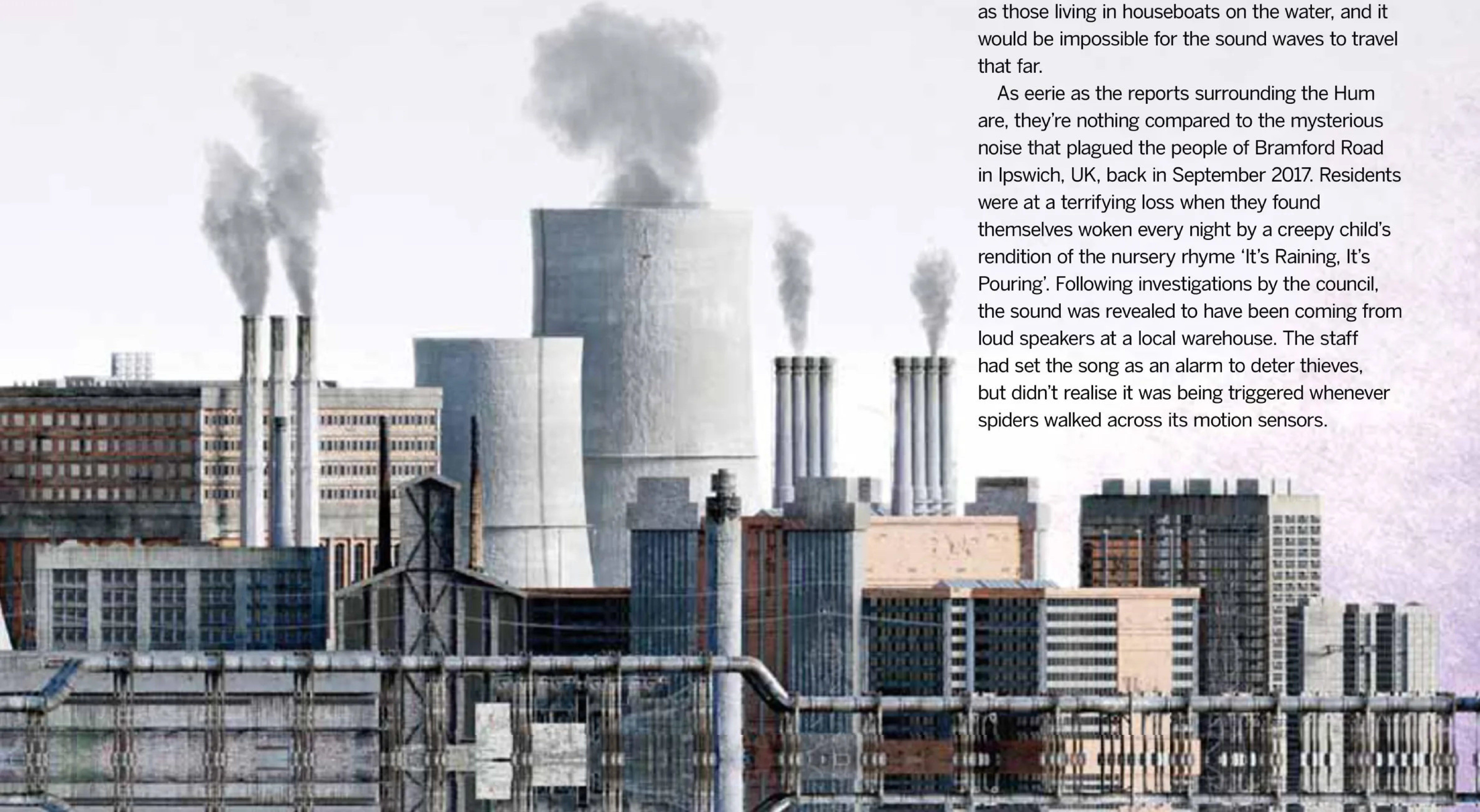
The West Seattle Hum was believed to have been caused by local fish until it was revealed that the sound could be heard on land as well as on houseboats

in the area. The idea of a quiet, low-frequency sound that not everyone can hear might seem annoying at worse for those who can, but the Bristol Hum drove many to distraction, and the inescapable noise is even believed to have been linked to two suicides. The noise was explained away as being produced by industrial fans at a nearby warehouse. But despite the fact that said warehouse is no longer in operation, some locals insist the Hum continues to this day.

Since those early reports, other versions of the Hum have been heard all over the world, from Canada and the United States to Germany and New Zealand, and each has seemingly been logically explained. The Windsor Hum, which could be heard in Ontario, took the form of a low droning vibration and was blamed on a heavily industrialised section of the River Rouge. The Hum in Kokomo, Indiana was put down to either a cooling tower at a local casting plant or an air compressor at a manufacturing facility. But even after repairs, the Hum persisted.

Other Hums have been blamed on tinnitus, jet streams, military radio waves, and even the human ears generating their own noises, known as spontaneous otoacoustic emissions. The West Seattle Hum was thought to have been the mating call of the midshipman fish – however, that explanation was dismissed when it was discovered the sound was affecting people on land as well as those living in houseboats on the water, and it would be impossible for the sound waves to travel that far.

As eerie as the reports surrounding the Hum are, they're nothing compared to the mysterious noise that plagued the people of Bramford Road in Ipswich, UK, back in September 2017. Residents were at a terrifying loss when they found themselves woken every night by a creepy child's rendition of the nursery rhyme 'It's Raining, It's Pouring'. Following investigations by the council, the sound was revealed to have been coming from loud speakers at a local warehouse. The staff had set the song as an alarm to deter thieves, but didn't realise it was being triggered whenever spiders walked across its motion sensors.



American writer Edward Hunter coined the term 'brainwashing' in the 1950s when describing methods used by the Chinese government

"The aim of this type of warfare is to influence the emotions, opinions and behaviour of anyone deemed to be a threat"

THESE THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR OWN

Terrified that the Soviets might unlock the hidden powers of the mind, the US government began a series of bizarre experiments in a bid to master the supernatural

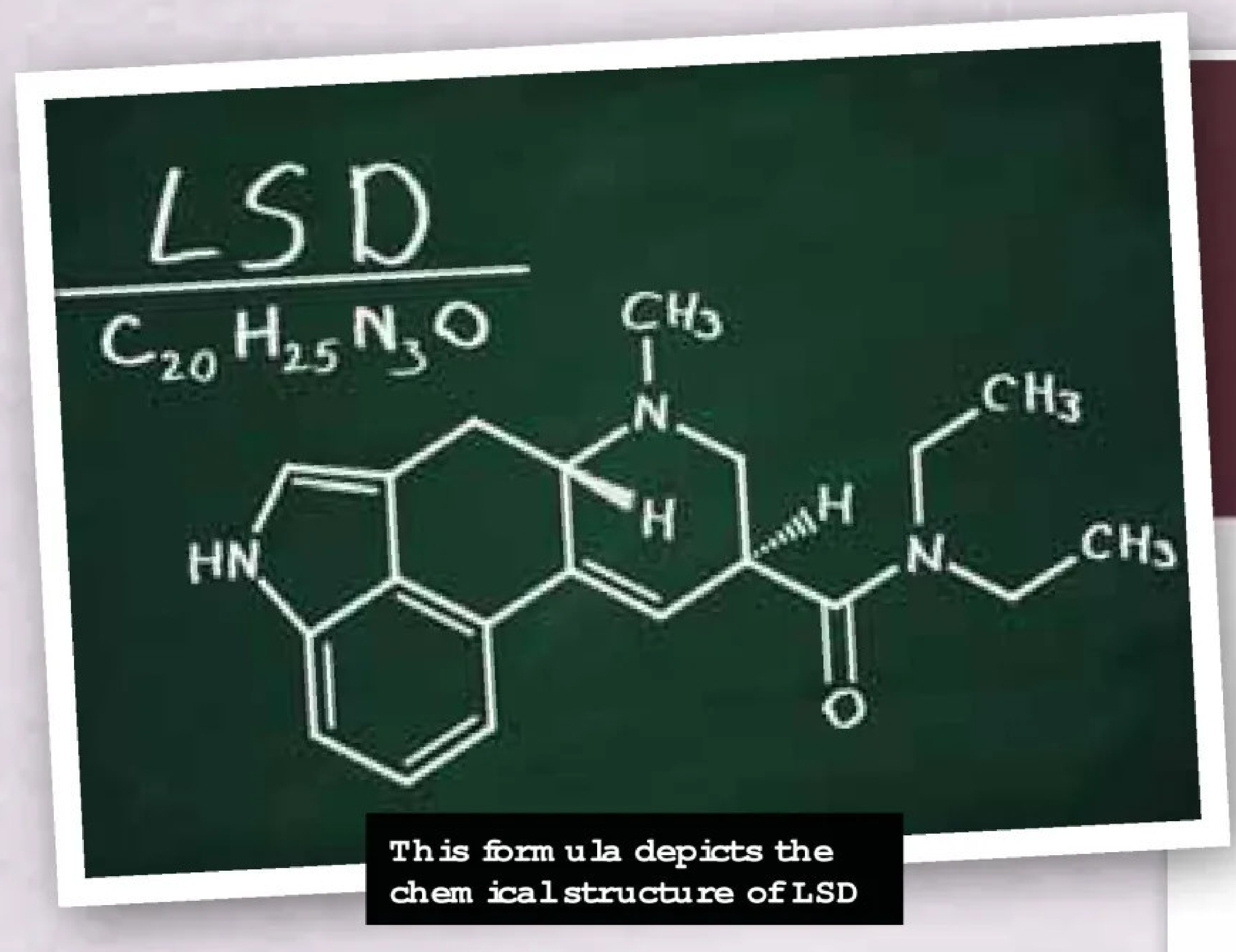
WRITTEN BY **BEE GINGER**

The concept of creating a tireless warrior capable of waging superhuman warfare has its roots in the drug-addled experiments of the Nazis during WWII, tests that were often cruel and fundamentally failed in moulding the 'super soldier' that a desperate Third Reich longed for. However, the inability of Hitler's cronies to achieve this terrifying aim did little to deter future efforts, especially across the Atlantic, where an America locked in a seemingly endless Cold War with the Soviet Union went to extraordinary lengths to master the supernatural in its campaign against communism.

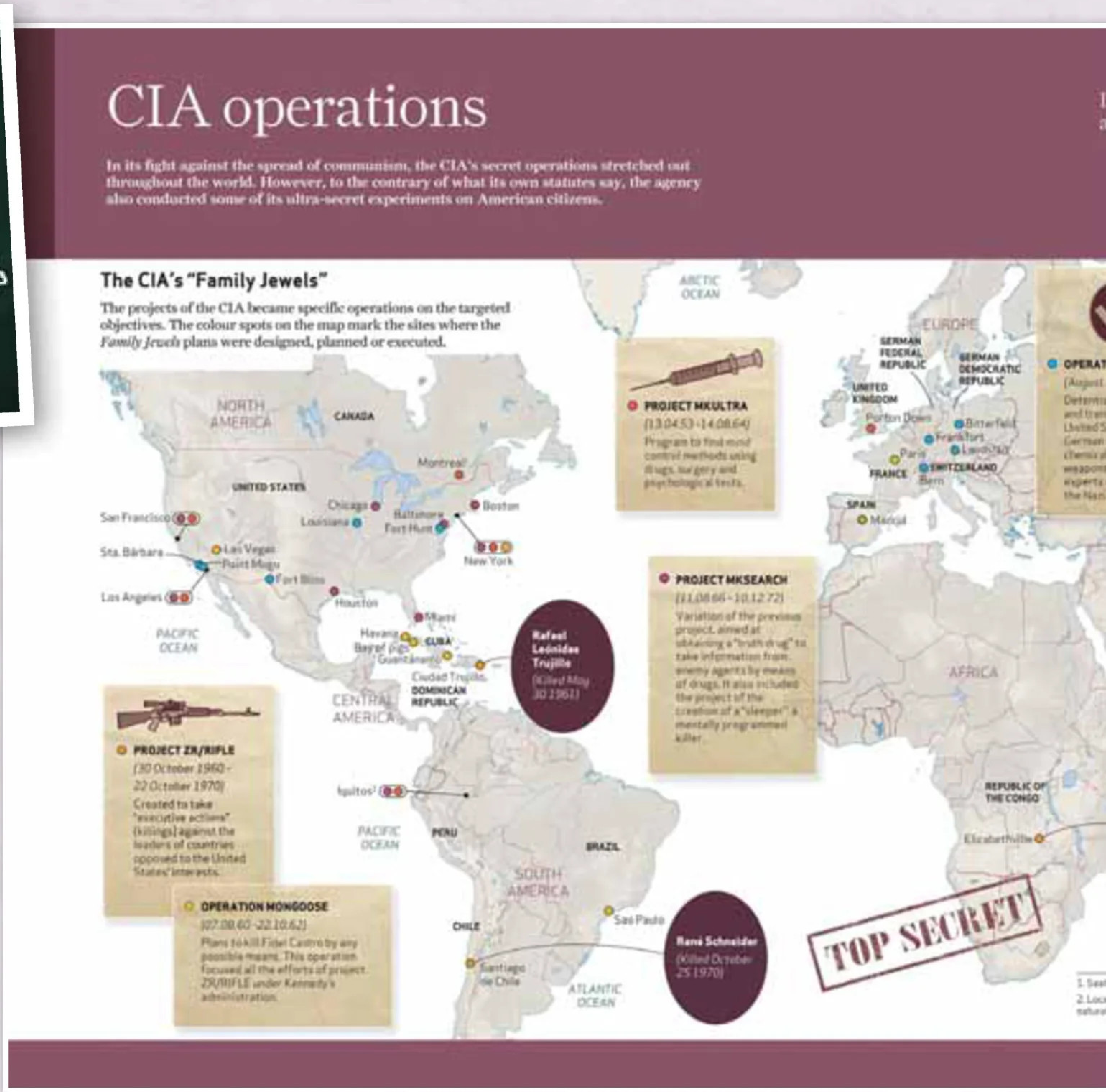
WE HAVE WAYS OF MAKING YOU TALK

'Psychological warfare' is a term believed to have migrated to the United States from Nazi Germany during WWII. The aim of this type of warfare is to influence the emotions, opinions and behaviour of anyone deemed to be a threat to a nation's security and its ambitions – a form of brainwashing to be exact. The CIA's mind-control projects were essentially a continuation of the work that originated in both Nazi and Japanese concentration camps during the war, in some sense literally, as the CIA hired torturers and vivisectionists who had previously worked in these camps and based their own programme around experiments conducted by these former enemies. Some of the ex-Nazi scientists had worked on research pertaining to aerosol technologies, an exploration into how best to spray toxins or germs onto opponents. This included 'truth serum', the term referring to the various drugs used to try and extract honest and truthful statements from a person. During ancient times this substance would have been wine, but by the time WWII was raging barbiturates like sodium pentothal, sodium amytal and scopolamine were used. Under the influence of these drugs a person would be unable to lie as the brain's power of reasoning would temporarily be damaged. Similar substances were also studied and administered – all for the use of psychiatric purposes. Under the influence of these drugs a person's heart rate would begin to decrease, causing relaxation and a release from anxiety and tension. In this heightened state a person would begin to talk calmly of their knowledge or experiences when asked about a certain subject.

For their part the Nazis favoured the use of mescaline as a truth-inducing drug, while the CIA began to look into the benefits of cannabis and LSD. But it was the KGB, the Soviet intelligence agency, that was rumoured to have found the most effective drug for getting to the truth, a substance that they codenamed SP-17. Not only


LSD
C20H25N3O
CH3
N
CH3
H
H
HN
N
CH3
O

This formula depicts the chemical structure of LSD


CIA operations
In its fight against the spread of communism, the CIA's secret operations stretched out throughout the world. However, to the contrary of what its own statutes say, the agency also conducted some of its ultra-secret experiments on American citizens.
The CIA's "Family Jewels"
The projects of the CIA became specific operations on the targeted objectives. The colour spots on the map mark the sites where the Family Jewels plans were designed, planned or executed.
ARCTIC OCEAN
NORTH AMERICA
CANADA
UNITED STATES
Montreal
Boston
Chicago
Louisiana
Baltimore
Fort Hunt
New York
San Francisco
Sta. Bárbara
Las Vegas
Point Mugu
Fort Bliss
Los Angeles
Houston
Miami
PACIFIC OCEAN
Havana
Bay of pigs
CUBA
Guantánamo
Ciudad Trujillo
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
CENTRAL AMERICA
Rafael Leónidas Trujillo
(Killed May 30 1961)
PROJECT MKULTRA
(13.04.53 - 14.08.64)
Program to find mind control methods using drugs, surgery and psychological tests.
PROJECT MKSEARCH
(11.08.66 - 10.12.72)
Variation of the previous project, aimed at obtaining a "truth drug" to take information from enemy agents by means of drugs. It also included the project of the creation of a "sleeper": a mentally programmed killer.
PROJECT ZR/RIFLE
(30 October 1960 - 22 October 1970)
Created to take "executive actions" (killings) against the leaders of countries opposed to the United States' interests.
OPERATION MONGOOSE
(07.08.60 - 22.10.62)
Plans to kill Fidel Castro by any possible means. This operation focused all the efforts of project ZR/RIFLE under Kennedy's administration.
Iquitos
PACIFIC OCEAN
PERU
BRAZIL
SOUTH AMERICA
CHILE
Sao Paulo
Santiago de Chile
ATLANTIC OCEAN
René Schneider
(Killed October 25 1970)
TOP SECRET
EUROPE
GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC
GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
UNITED KINGDOM
Porton Down
Bitterfeld
Frankfurt
Paris
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
Bern
SPAIN
Madrid
AFRICA
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
Elizabethville

was it incredibly effective at eliciting information by loosening tongues but it had no taste or scent when added to a beverage, and as a bonus it would erase the target's memories of the interrogation. All very James Bond!

Whisperings of this wonder drug triggered the CIA to conduct its own secret tests and up the ante in the search for something that would enable them to control minds and gain an edge. This led them to forming a programme that until 1977 remained a closely guarded secret.

MKULTRA

Approved in 1953 by the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Allen Dulles, the project, named MKUltra ran for two decades. It was inspired by the United States government's assumption that the Soviets were becoming advanced in mind-control technology. Refusing to be left behind, they prepared to go to extreme lengths. What followed was a staggering example of a government abusing the rights of its citizens by gathering information about them without their permission or knowledge.

Conducted in complete secrecy, MKUltra was intended to study "the use of biological and chemical materials in altering human behaviour". Due to both legal and ethical questions surrounding the programme the CIA fought hard to keep any information under wraps; the last thing they wanted was any negative response from the public.

One of the most common areas of research was into brain-altering chemicals and drugs

Overseen by a chemist named Sidney Gottlieb, who first introduced the agency to the hallucinogenic LSD, the project saw the CIA grant itself the authority to conduct research into how different drugs may affect the body in various situations. For example, would drugs enhance the intoxicating effects of alcohol? Could drugs produce confusion or amnesia? By contrast, could drugs in any way bolster a person's ability to withstand coercion, torture and privation?

The answers to these questions, along with many others, were sought via a plethora of experiments. But where to find subjects? As Allen Dulles himself complained, there were insufficient "human guinea pigs to try these extraordinary techniques". The answer to this supply problem lay in targeting terminally ill patients, prisoners, drug addicts and sex workers – people who would not be missed in society, or as Gottlieb coldly put it, "people who could not fight back."

Gottlieb and his deputy Robert Lashbrook were both experts in the field of poison and medical experiments. Their interrogation projects tormented and permanently shattered the minds of hundreds of people as they ruthlessly pushed the boundaries. Just how much LSD could be given to these 'expandable' guinea pigs before they reached breaking point? Could an enormous dose in fact blast away a person's consciousness for good, leaving a fresh canvas on which to impress a new personality and impulses? Such was Gottlieb's obsession that at one point he bought the entire world's supply of LSD at a cost of $240,000. On its arrival in the United States it was distributed around clinics, prisons, hospitals, various institutions and through bogus foundations, and administered under the guise of research. The project later expanded abroad, with MKDELTA established to govern the use of the programme's materials overseas. Ultimately, with over $25 million spent on the project and its offshoots, MKUltra proved to be a pricey foray that resulted in an even higher human cost.

A Senate hearing concluded in 1975–76 that "the research and development program, and particularly the covert testing programs, resulted in massive abridgements of the rights of American citizens, sometimes with tragic consequences." It is thought that many of the test subjects would

id the CIA ever use
nimals as spies?
ASIA
ION PAPERCLIP
1945-1947)
Ngo Dinh Diem
Abdul Karem Karim
IRAQ
Baghdad
SOUTH VIETNAM
Bien Hoa
Saigon
Patrice Emery Lumumba
(Killed January 17 1961)
PROJECT PHOENIX
INDIAN OCEAN

The CIA undertook secret operations across the world from the 1940s to 1970s in its relentless war on communism

have continued to suffer the residual effects of experiments for the rest of their lives, and at least two people perished, the only fatalities that were officially reported.

While one could perhaps argue that the controlled testing of a drug like LSD in the name of national security might be beneficial for the greater good, it was proven in the case of MKUltra that the drug was administered to unwitting individuals in dangerous quantities with a fundamental disregard for the person or their life. Shockingly this was one of 162 secret projects financed indirectly by the CIA, many of which were contracted out and the testing done at research institutions including universities. Many of these establishments, however, had no knowledge that they were in fact dealing with the long arm of the CIA.

In 1977 many of the programme's financial records unexpectedly came to light despite a purge four years earlier that had destroyed countless documents. Further investigations soon brought about a fresh round of inquiries into MKUltra. Public fury led to two lawsuits, but to date nobody has been held accountable or made to answer for the unethical testing under the umbrella of MKUltra. The Supreme Court of America continued to protect the CIA and government over the rights of the American people, which many will argue continues to be the case today. Stephen Kinzer, a journalist who devoted several years to investigating MKUltra, described the operation as "the most sustained search in history for techniques of mind control".

Although it will have been little consolation to those who were tested on against their will, CIA files do suggest that there was some success in the programme. When describing the purpose of one of the sub programmes, Richard Helms wrote on an internal CIA memo, "We intend to investigate the development of a chemical material which causes a reversible, nontoxic aberrant mental state, the specific nature of which can be reasonably well predicted for each individual. This material could potentially aid in discrediting individuals, eliciting information, and implanting suggestions and other forms of mental control."

However, further findings into the results and countless reams of documentation since released by the CIA concluded that many results were doctored. Or was this another cover- up – a false admission of failure and deceit to hide a more sinister truth?

PROJECT STAR GATE

Drugs, while comprising a key part of these illegal research projects, were not the only method favoured by experimenters: many also looked into the benefits of parapsychology. This is the examination of physical phenomena and psychokinesis as well as cognitive phenomena known as extrasensory perception (ESP).

ESP is often referred to as a 'sixth sense', an awareness of information not received by any of the other five senses but instead detected by the mind. It is most commonly associated with psychometry, precognition, telepathy and clairvoyance. This discipline is often criticised as it cannot be accounted for by natural law, and many of its practitioners have been discredited due to a lack of evidence of the existence of psychic phenomena. Yet this hasn't prevented many scientists from devoting their careers to parapsychology and the investigation into the existence of ESP. Between 1972 and 1995 the Defence Intelligence Agency and the CIA spent an incredible $20 million researching as part of a scheme named 'Project Star Gate'.

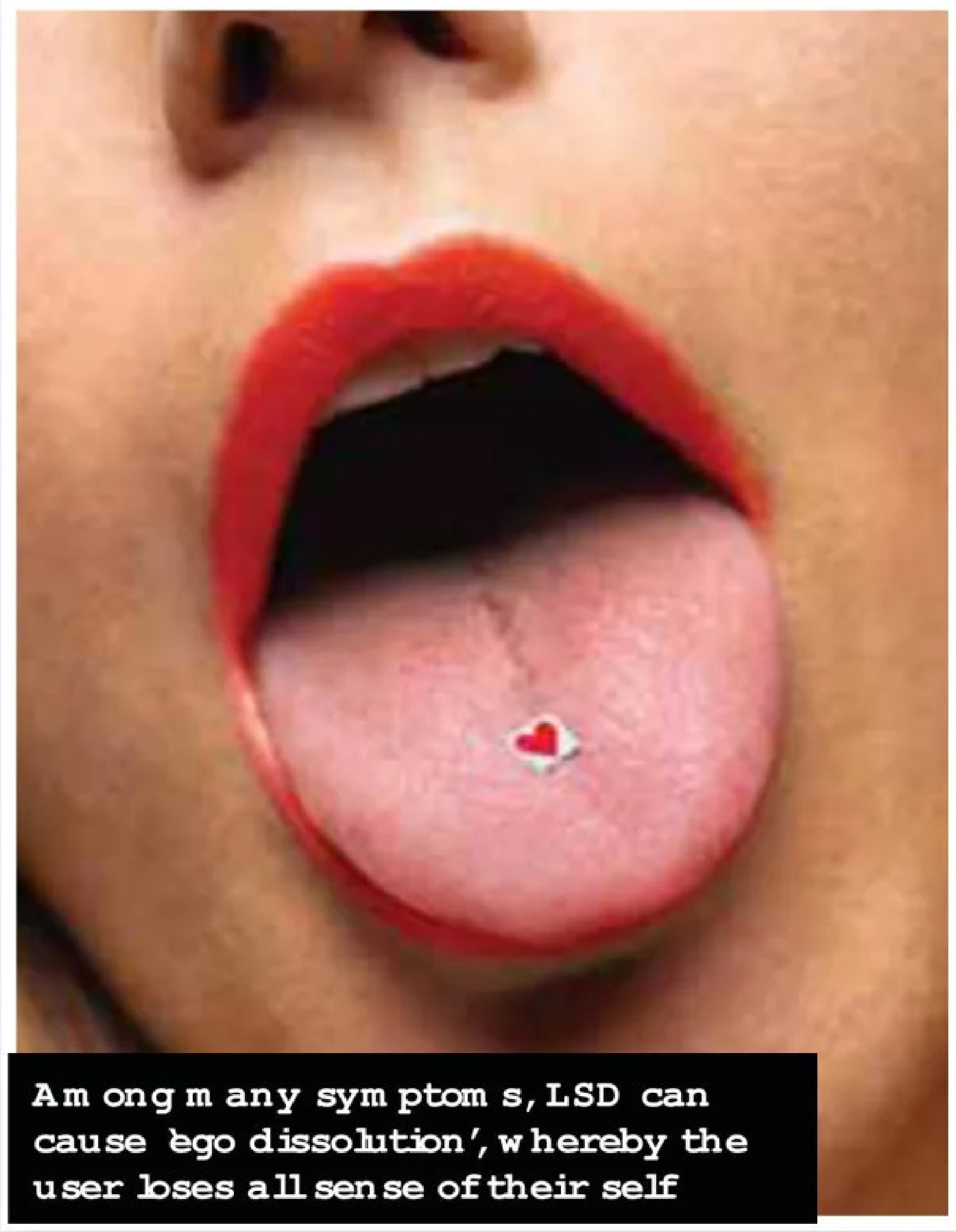
Although it may sound like the title of a sci-fi movie, Project Star Gate was actually a mission

TRIPPING OUT – THE BRAIN ON LSD

LSD (or lysergic acid diethylamide to give it its full name) is a powerful psychedelic drug that, in a sufficiently high dosage, literally trips the switches in the human brain to cause hallucinations. Created using a substance extracted from the ergot fungus, LSD hones in on one of the brain's 14 serotonin receptors, 5-HT2A. In normal circumstances serotonin (among many other roles) is thought to prevent the distortion of our perception of the world around us, but when LSD is consumed it impacts serotonin regulation, therefore warping a person's sense of their surroundings and leading them to perceive things that aren't really there. One patient given the drug during MI6 trials in the 1950s later recalled watching walls melting and people's faces cracking.

Other symptoms caused by LSD range from dilated pupils and increased blood pressure to paranoia, synesthesia-like effects such as feeling sounds and hearing colours, and even 'mystical experiences' in which people lose all sense of time and space and can be overwhelmed by a sense of awe.

While LSD is not addictive and its effects tend to wear off within 24 hours it was classified as an illegal substance in the US in the wake of the MKUltra experiments and is considered a Class A drug in the UK, with a seven-year sentence for possession and potentially a life sentence for supplying it.



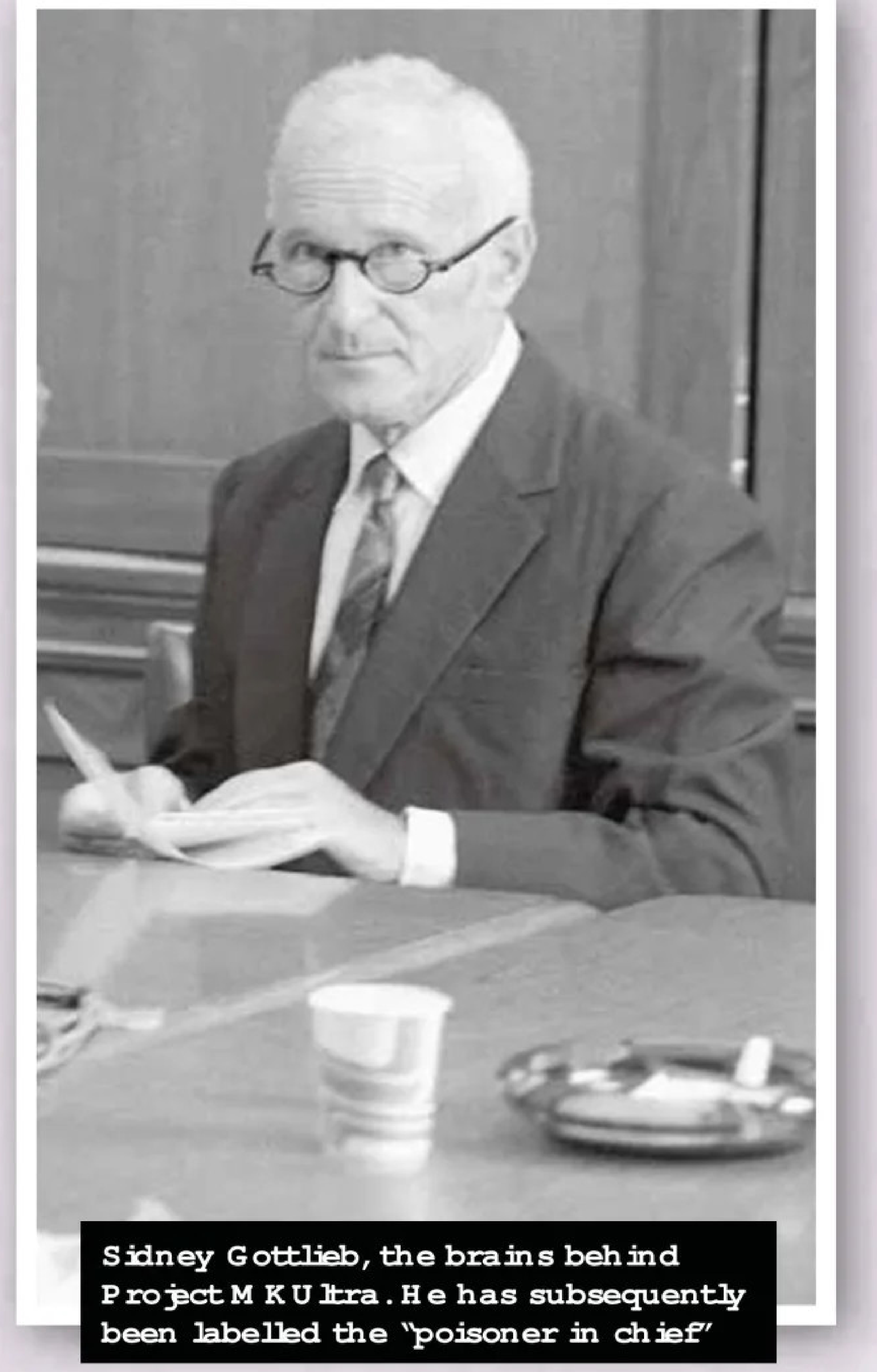
Among many symptoms, LSD can cause 'ego dissolution', whereby the user loses all sense of their self developed by the CIA in 1978 designed to explore and expand psychic abilities. This was the first project of its kind, the idea behind it being to harness the supernatural using new and innovative methods, the likes of which had never been deployed before.

As with many government projects, the end aim was to find supernatural powers that could be put to military use, including spying. Cost effective and with "no known defence" to stop it, psychic spying, if it was possible, would hand the US a devastating advantage over her enemies, enabling US espionage in the form of monitoring people from afar and interfering in their efforts without risk of detection.

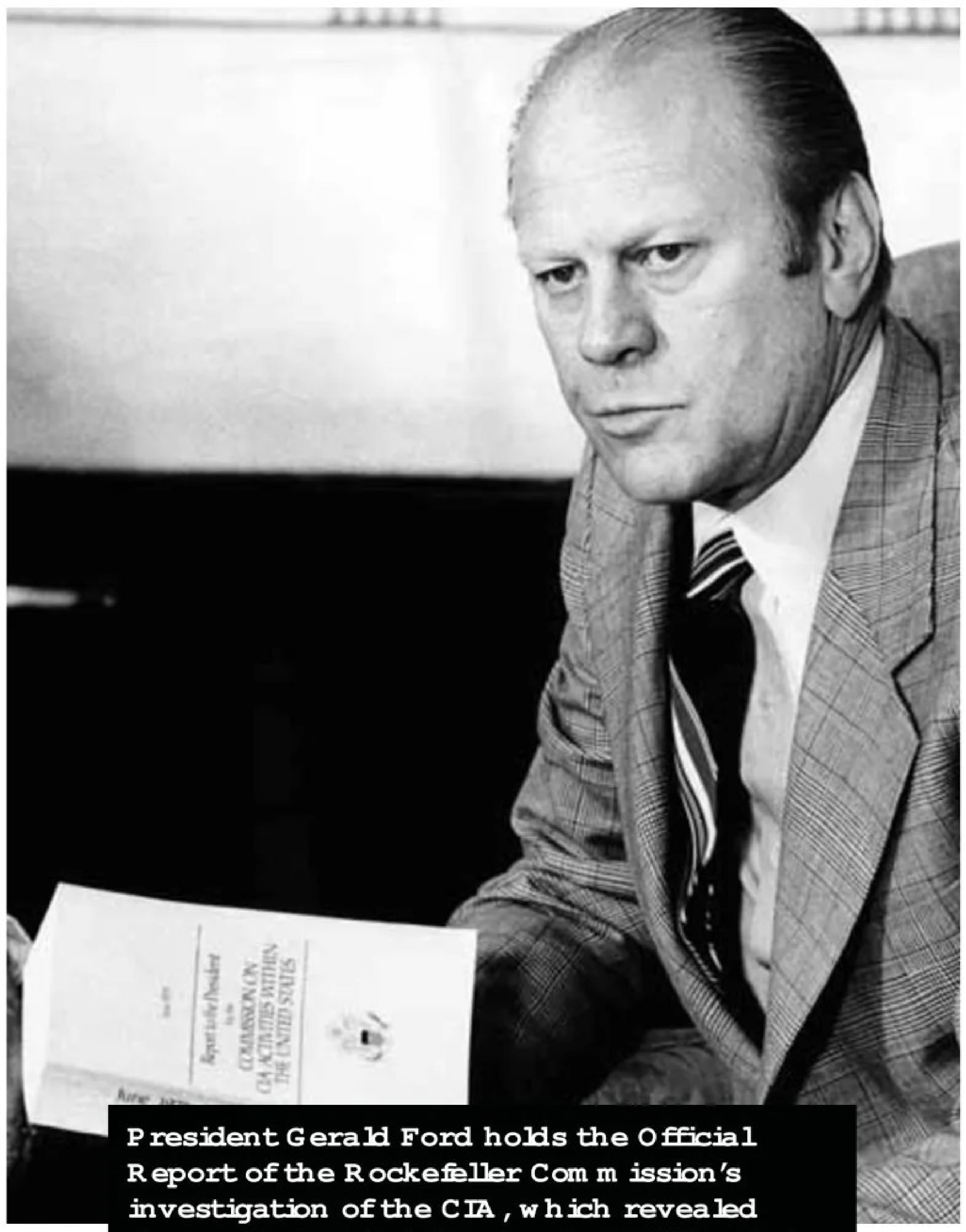
One mental process was 'psychoenergetics', which involves a person perceiving and even changing the characteristics of someone who is separate from them either in time or space. It is similar in many ways to telekinesis, whereby someone can move an object with their mind, like Matilda in the Roald Dahl book. Top-secret research took place at the Stanford Research Institute in Menlo Park, California, and such was the government's determination to leave no stone (or should that be mind) unturned, proclaimed psychic Uri Geller was recruited, not for his skills at bending metal cutlery but instead for his professed ability at both reading and controlling minds. Another technique that was examined was remote viewing, when a person can see things happening in another location (see the next page for more on this).

Much has been written by those involved in these special projects, including its unwitting subjects. Notorious mobster James Whitey Bulger was one of those experimented on. Thinking he was taking part in an experiment aimed at finding a cure for schizophrenia, he was administered LSD on a daily basis for more than a year. In letters he wrote while in prison he detailed the horrific effects of the drugs. Upon learning of the MKUltra programme he wrote, "I was in prison for committing a crime, but they committed a greater crime on me."

Janet Uhlar, one of the jurors who voted to convict Bulger for murder during his trial in 2013 (at which he faced several charges including racketeering and extortion) has since revealed her regret at doing so. "Had I known, I would have absolutely held off on the murder charges. He didn't murder prior to the LSD. His brain may have been altered, so how could you say he was really guilty?"



Sidney Gottlieb, the brains behind Project MKUltra. He has subsequently been labelled the 'poisoner in chief'



President Gerald Ford holds the Official Report of the Rockefeller Commission's investigation of the CIA, which revealed abuses that included not only MKUltra but also mail opening and secret surveillance

> "Rainbow power was something Channon envisioned for his army, with multicultural members all powered by unity and diversity"

GOATS, GONGS AND GINSENG

Unsurprisingly, MKUltra and the mysteries surrounding it became fertile ground for writers, including journalist Jon Ronson, who in 2004 penned the brilliantly titled *The Men Who Stare at Goats*. A close look into the possible military use of the paranormal and New Age concepts, its unique title refers to attempts made at killing goats by staring at them with the intent to stop their hearts. The 2009 movie starring George Clooney is based on Ronson's work.

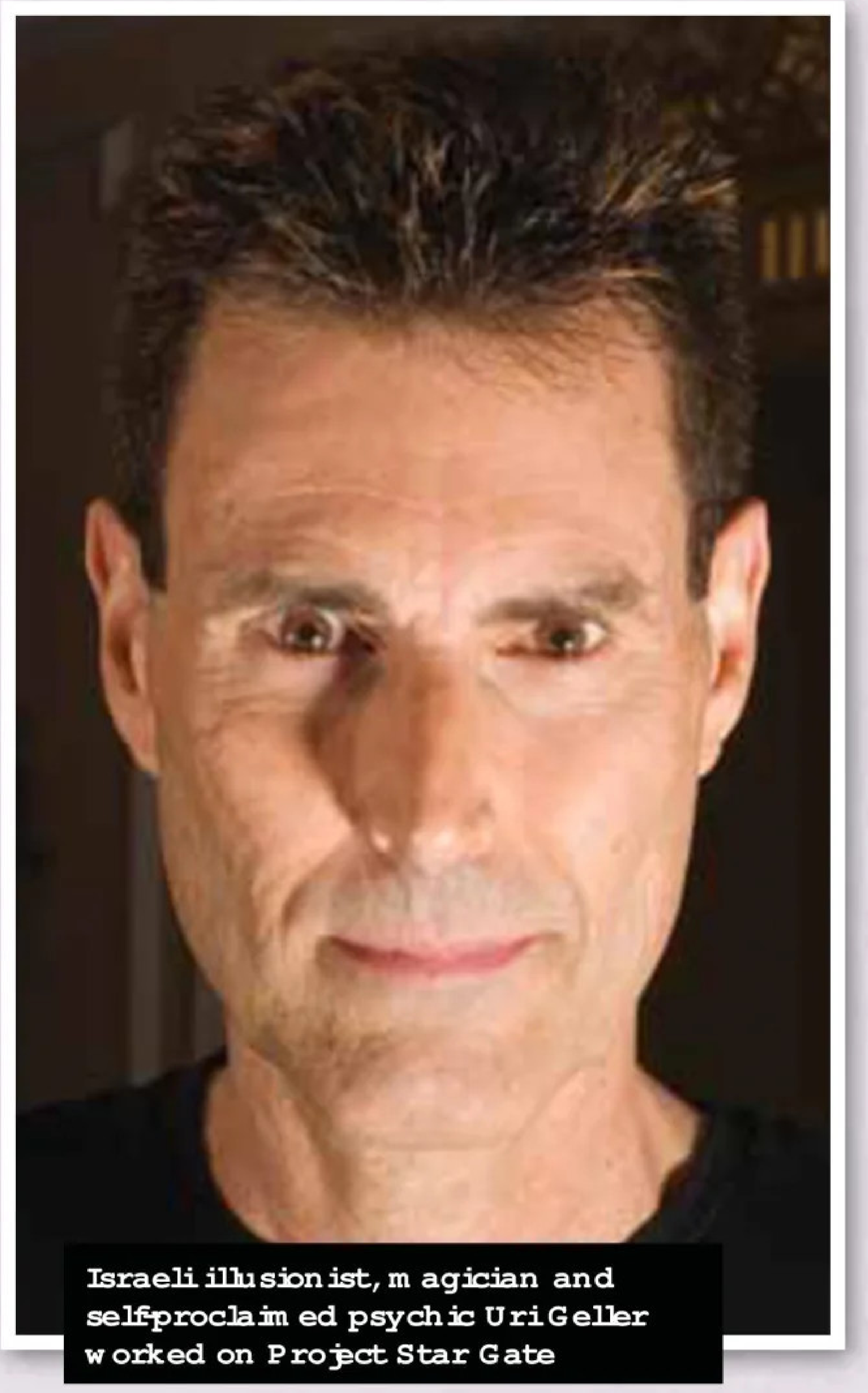
In the book Ronson tells the remarkable story of Lieutenant Colonel Jim Channon, a US soldier who, after having served his country in Vietnam, proposed the idea of a new army composed of supersoldiers. Channon wanted his army to be a little more New Age, and having previously spent time in the 1970s with the group responsible for starting the Human Potential Movement, he felt best placed to write an operations manual for his new force. It was to be called First Earth Battalion and Channon went to great lengths planning every aspect of his army, which he detailed in a manual spanning 125 pages filled with polemical essays, graphs, maps and drawings.

The men would need to consume foods to enhance their night vision, the uniform would have pouches for ginseng regulators, words of peace and Indigenous music would play from loudspeakers around the compound, and each soldier would be issued with divining tools such as pendulums and crystals. Members were to be called 'warrior monks' and their loyalty was to be principally towards the planet rather than any nation state, therefore any forms of conflict should be resolved in a nondestructive fashion.

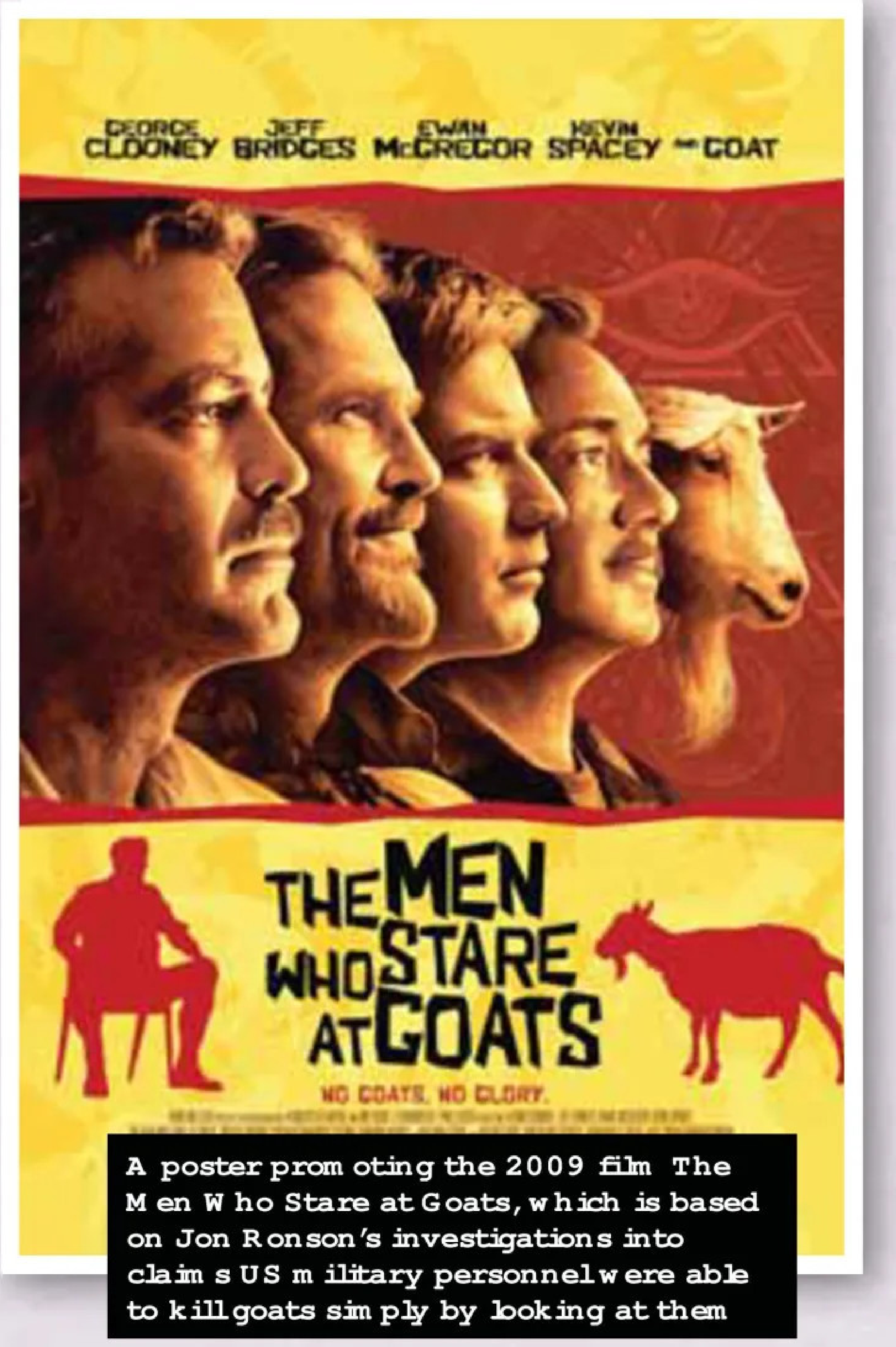
Rainbow power was something Channon envisioned for his army, with multicultural members all powered by unity and diversity, structure without status and uniforms without uniformity. Sadly Channon's unique vision never came to fruition.

TWISTED MINDS

This period in the CIA's colourful history has certainly been the inspiration for many films, aside from the one based on Ronson's work, which was accompanied by a three-part TV series titled *Crazy Rulers of the World*. After all, who doesn't like a science-fiction movie or a sinister thriller? But what happens when you discover that the truth really is stranger – and in this case scarier – than fiction? Of the many projects exposed to date, MKUltra's Subproject 68 is truly one of the most heinous.



Israeli illusionist, magician and selfproclaimed psychic Uri Geller worked on Project Star Gate



A poster promoting the 2009 film The Men Who Stare at Goats, which is based on Jon Ronson's investigations into claims US military personnel were able to kill goats simply by looking at them

Funded in the late 1950s, it was headed up by Donald Ewen Cameron of the Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He designed his experiments with the intent to "depattern" his subjects and reduce their mental age to that of a child by erasing their minds and subsequently their memories and then "reprogramming" their thoughts and personalities in a way he saw fit. In order to achieve this he would place individuals into drug induced comas for 88 days, which already sounds like the plot of a horror movie. He would then administer high-voltage shocks over the course of weeks or months (many patients received as many as 360 shocks over the course of their "care"). This was followed up by "psychic driving", where repetitive statements would be played through speakers that had been placed in blacked-out football helmets that Cameron would bind to his patients' heads. These messages would be played for weeks on end, often for as many as 20 hours a day. Cameron even forced one poor soul to listen to a message for 101 days non-stop.

Horse stables on the plot had been converted into a sensory deprivation and isolation chamber, and many patients were locked away here for weeks on end and given dangerously large insulin injections daily to keep them in a coma-like state. It really was the stuff of nightmares.

Operation Midnight Climax was another study carried out to gauge the effects of LSD and hallucinogens on non-consenting adults. The CIA had numerous prostitutes on their payroll and these women were tasked with luring clients to safehouses where agents watched them from behind one-way glass. Here they were plied with varying substances including LSD, and once the sex was over their 'hostesses' would begin asking probing post-coital questions in the hope of convincing them to reveal secrets. Subliminal messages were also used in the hope of gaining involuntary information and confessions. Senate investigators were later told that the aim of these experiments was to study sexual behaviour when combined with mind control, but given that numerous CIA operatives indulged in both the prostitutes and drugs, how much they gleaned from the scheme is questionable.

Reprogramming the minds of combtants has been an intelligence goal for decades

Supersoldiers. Star Gate. Mind control. It all adds up to its own dark and disturbing LSD trip, one that casts a long and shameful shadow on the history of the CIA. It's enough to make you wonder whether if what you have been reading is real, or is it all a government- controlled psychedelic dream?

I SEE RED PEOPLE – SPYING ON THE SOVIETS

Spurred on by the fear of the Soviet Union secretly mastering ESP during the Cold War, the US wasted little time and plenty of money in trying to unlock the secrets of a 'sixth sense' in the struggle for global supremacy. Ultimately the project was written off as an expensive failure and shut down, but that isn't to say that it didn't enjoy some small victories along the way.

Joseph McMoneagle, a retired member of the US Army, played a role in no less than 450 different missions in the late 70s and early 80s. Along with helping the authorities to find captives being held in Iran, McMoneagle, who was called 'Remote Viewer No.1' in Project Star Gate files, was also able to expose the real purpose of a supposed calculator belonging to a KGB spy arrested in South Africa – it was in fact secreting a shortwave radio.

McMoneagle also claimed to have spied on the Red Brigades (a Communist terrorist organisation located in Italy) and to have pinpointed the exact location of the Soviet Union's 'Typhoon' submarines. However, he didn't get everything right. Aside from asserting that humans evolved from otter-like creatures that were made in a laboratory, McMoneagle stated that between 2002 and 2006 society would make moves towards abolishing TV, discover a love for tattoos that could replace clothes and find a cure for AIDS. Still, perhaps he just got his dates wrong.

Joseph McMoneagle claimed to have pinpointed the location of Soviet submarines using his proclaimed psychic powers

MOON MUSIC

Apollo 10 astronauts certainly didn't expect to hear eerie music when they passed round the dark side of the Moon

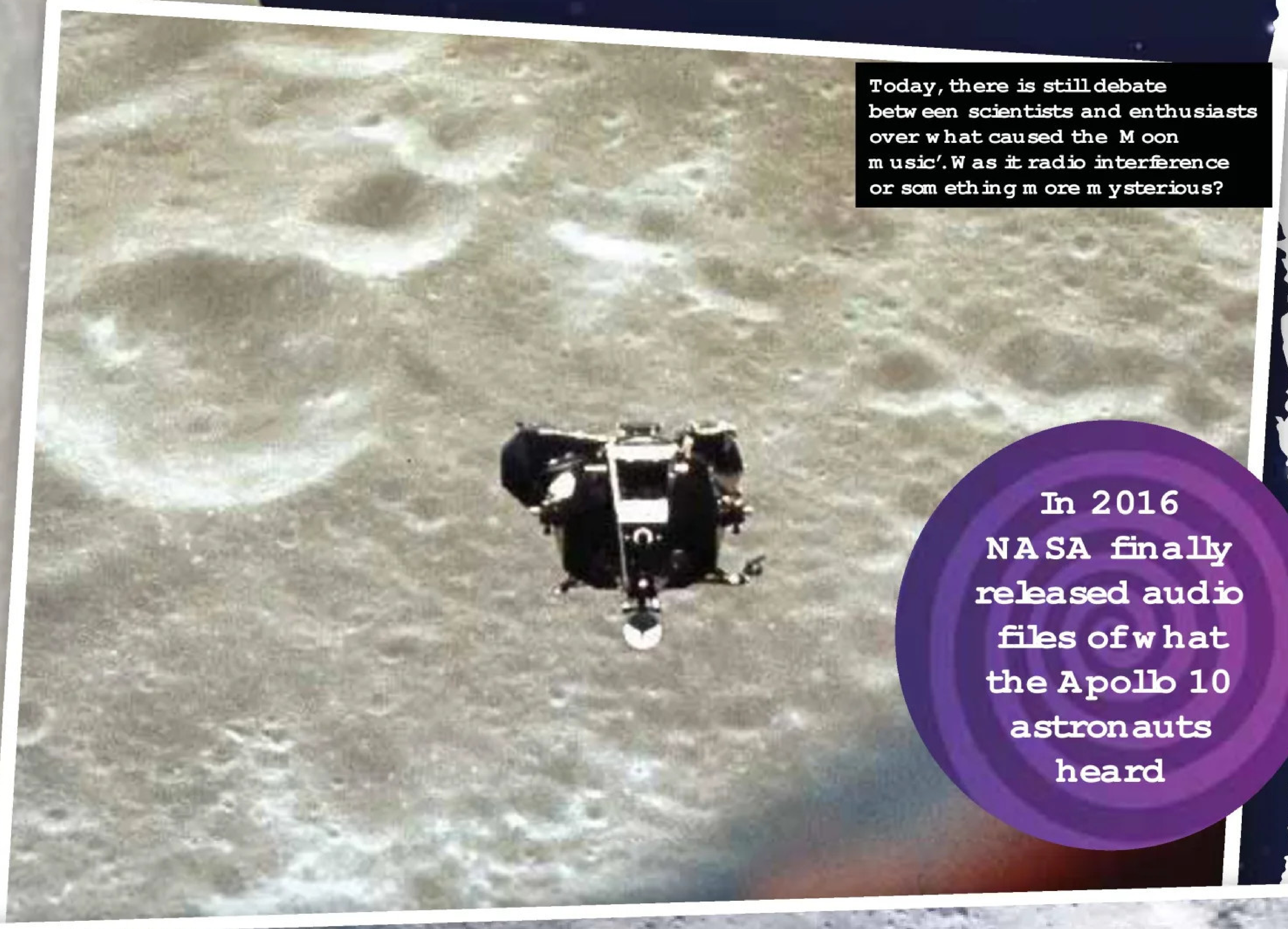
WRITTEN BY **CATHERINE CURZON**

As the astronauts of Apollo 10 lost contact with Earth on the dark side of the Moon, an eerie whistle sounded in the darkness

In 1969, the astronauts on board the Apollo 10 spacecraft passed around the dark side of the Moon, travelling further from Earth than any human ever before. They were more than 22,000 miles from home, and enveloped by the dark silence of space. Or rather, they expected to be. Instead, as they made their journey around the Moon, the astronauts suddenly heard a strange whistling sound, which they discussed in transcripts of their conversations during the voyage. "That music even sounds outer-spacey […] that whistling sound," said Gene Cernan, who was piloting the lunar module, and the tantalising mystery of the moon music was born. As they listened, the men speculated on whether anyone on Earth would believe what they had heard and whether or not they should report their findings. Adding fuel to the fire that there might be something to hide was the fact that the classified transcripts remained sealed for more than 40 years. The three-man crew never discussed the sounds publicly.

Despite the best efforts of experts and amateurs alike, according to some, the explanation for the eerie whistling the astronauts heard is still unexplained; others believe it's nothing more than technical interference. Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins heard the whistling himself on a later mission and admitted that the eerie sound would have terrified him, were it not for the fact that he knew it was nothing more than radio interference between the command module and the lunar module. Though it might have been as innocent as radio interference, enthusiasts have pointed out that such sounds would be easily identifiable to the crew of Apollo 10. Scientists have countered with the fact that that Cassini heard similar sounds during its observation of Saturn, which were caused by particles in space interfering with the mission's radio. The Moon, however, doesn't have the atmospheric conditions of Saturn that led to the interference the Cassini probe picked up.

Whilst they listened to the Moon's music, the astronauts were completely cut off from communication with Earth. Perhaps they didn't discuss their experience because they feared how they might be perceived if they did. After all, in the vast blackness of space, when the Earth might as well be a million miles away, an eerie whistle from the dark side of the Moon is the last thing anyone would want to hear.



Today, there is still debate between scientists and enthusiasts over what caused the 'Moon music'. Was it radio interference or something more mysterious?

In 2016 NASA finally released audio files of what the Apollo 10 astronauts heard

As the crew of Apollo 10 listened to the whistling, they debated whether anyone back home would believe what they had heard in space

Sometimes the explanation for a puzzling event is only uncovered centuries after the fact, when new evidence is revealed

13 BIZARRE MYSTERIES SOLVED

Some of the most baffling events in history have finally been explained thanks to new research

WRITTEN BY **BEN GAZUR**

Everyone loves a mystery. The fact that there are some things which seem to defy explanation makes the world a more magical place and sparks our imagination. The universe is a pretty complex place and it is easy to construct elaborate theories about events that we do not understand.

Sometimes though there is no mystery. Simply because we do not know something does not mean that it will always be beyond our understanding. For thousands of years a bolt of lightning from the sky was a powerful and inexplicable event that fell from the heavens. Only with the development of science did we begin to understand the causes of natural phenomena and the science behind them.

With diligent research and the application of new techniques, historians and scientists have been able to solve some of history's most perplexing mysteries. The ability to test for DNA has revealed the answers to murder cases that are decades old. Access to new documents often uncovers hidden facets of historic events.

In many ways we are living in a golden age of mysteries. While people in the past had to be satisfied with never knowing the truth, today we can both enjoy a mystery and look forward to having it solved. Here are some of the knotty historic events that have finally been unpicked.

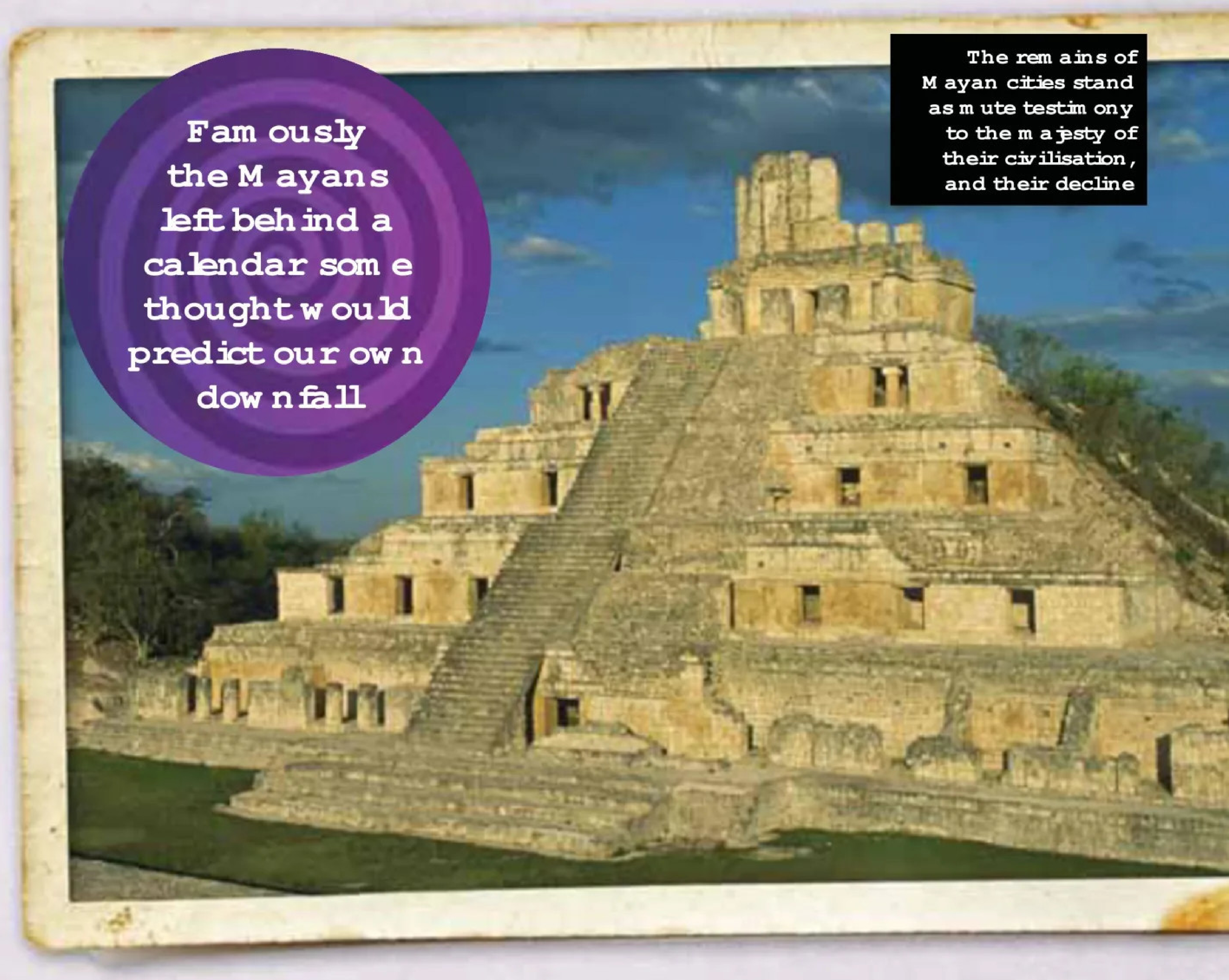
WHY DID THE MAYAN CIVILISATION COLLAPSE?

The Mayans built huge temples, vast cities, and ruled an empire – where did they go?

The Mayans had one of the most sophisticated civilisations in the world. Their buildings, art, and writing were second to none. For over a thousand years they dominated their region of central America. In the 9th and 10th centuries however their cities were abandoned and left to fall into ruin. Why this civilisation collapse happened has been one of the greatest mysteries in archaeology.

Dozens of theories have been suggested for what happened to the Mayans in this period. Were they conquered by another people? Were they wiped out by disease? Were they undone by climate changes? Or did they not collapse at all?

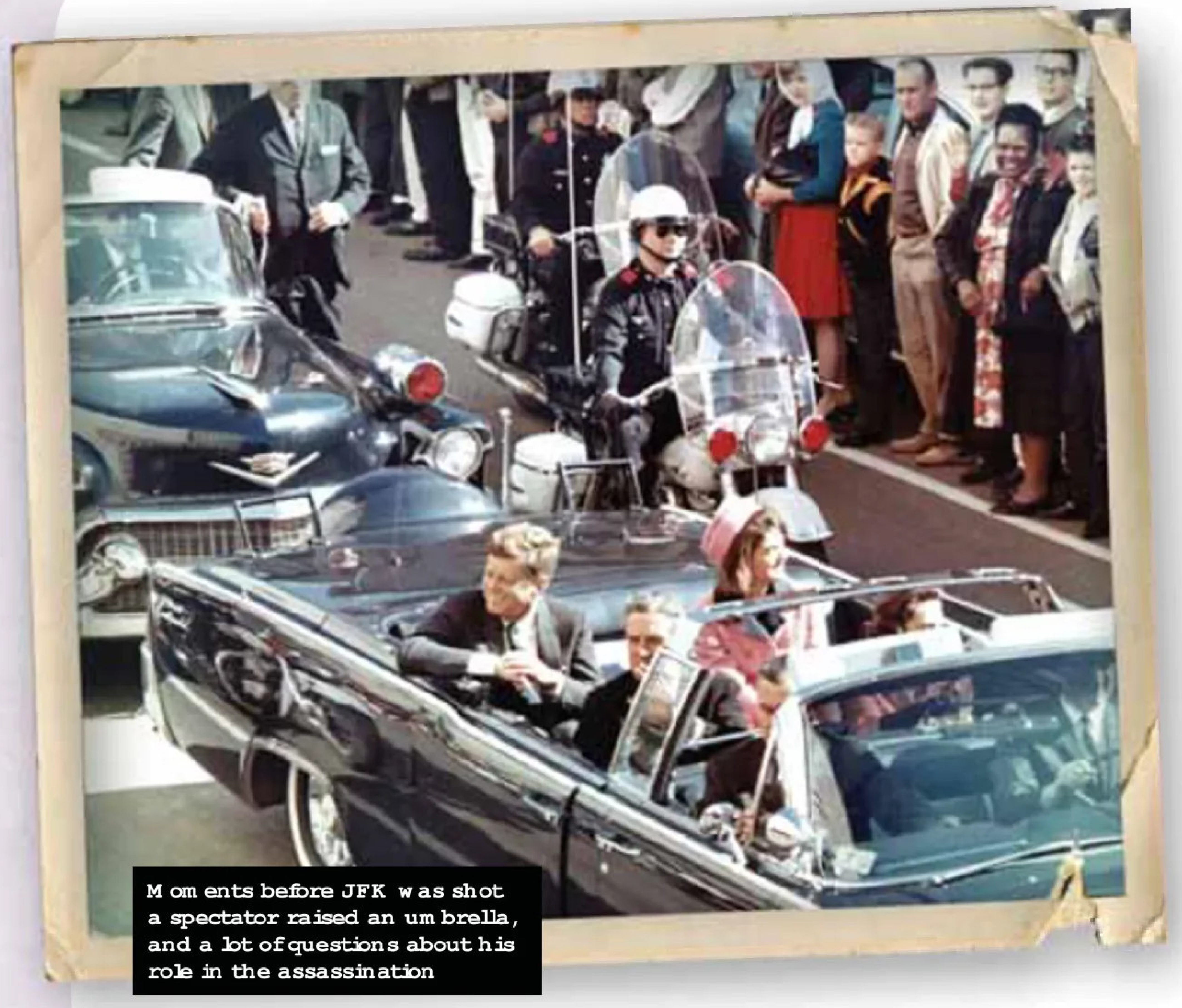
By examining the remains of Mayan civilisation a complex story becomes clear. It is certain some cities were gradually abandoned. A breakdown in trade and an overly large urban population may have made it hard to feed people. In fact though many Mayan cities flourished for centuries after the 'collapse.' The last Mayan city fell to the Spanish in 1697 and the descendants of Mayans number six million today.



Famously the Mayans left behind a calendar some thought would predict our own downfall

The remains of Mayan cities stand as mute testimony to the majesty of their civilisation, and their decline

"Why this civilisation collapse happened has been one of the greatest mysteries in archaeology"



Moments before JFK was shot a spectator raised an umbrella, and a lot of questions about his role in the assassination

THE 'UMBRELLA MAN'

The assassination of President Kennedy sparked many conspiracy theories – including one about a man wielding an umbrella

When President Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas in 1963 people immediately wanted answers about why, and how, such a thing could have happened. There were many aspects of the shooting that were unclear. Was there a single shooter, or were others involved? Evidence was scanty and the video of the event was obsessively examined. One person stood out – a man who opened an umbrella just as the president passed by, moments before the shooting. Why did he have an umbrella on a sunny day? Was 'Umbrella Man' sending a signal to the shooter? Later images showed him calmly walking away.

Umbrella Man came forward in 1978 as Louie Steven Witt and offered testimony to Congress. It turns out the raising of the umbrella was a protest. Black umbrellas were used to refer to the appeasement policies of Chamberlain in the 1930s. Several prominent leaders had been gifted black umbrellas. Witt was just in the wrong place, at the wrong time, acting strangely.

Images source: Getty, Wiki

The tracks left by the sailing stones show that they can change course as they travel hundreds of metres

SAILING STONES OF DEATH VALLEY

What is it makes rocks travel across the sands of the desert?

Visitors to Death Valley may notice rocks that appear to have gone sailing across the ground and leaving long trails in the sand. These 'sailing stones' are not driven by gravity, as they sit on flat surfaces. It appears that the stones, some of them weighing hundreds of pounds, have a mind of their own and somewhere to be.

Study of the rocks has revealed that ice and wind are the cause of their motions. In the frigid winter in the desert, large and thin sheets of ice form behind the rocks. A light wind pushes the ice against the stones and shoves them forwards.

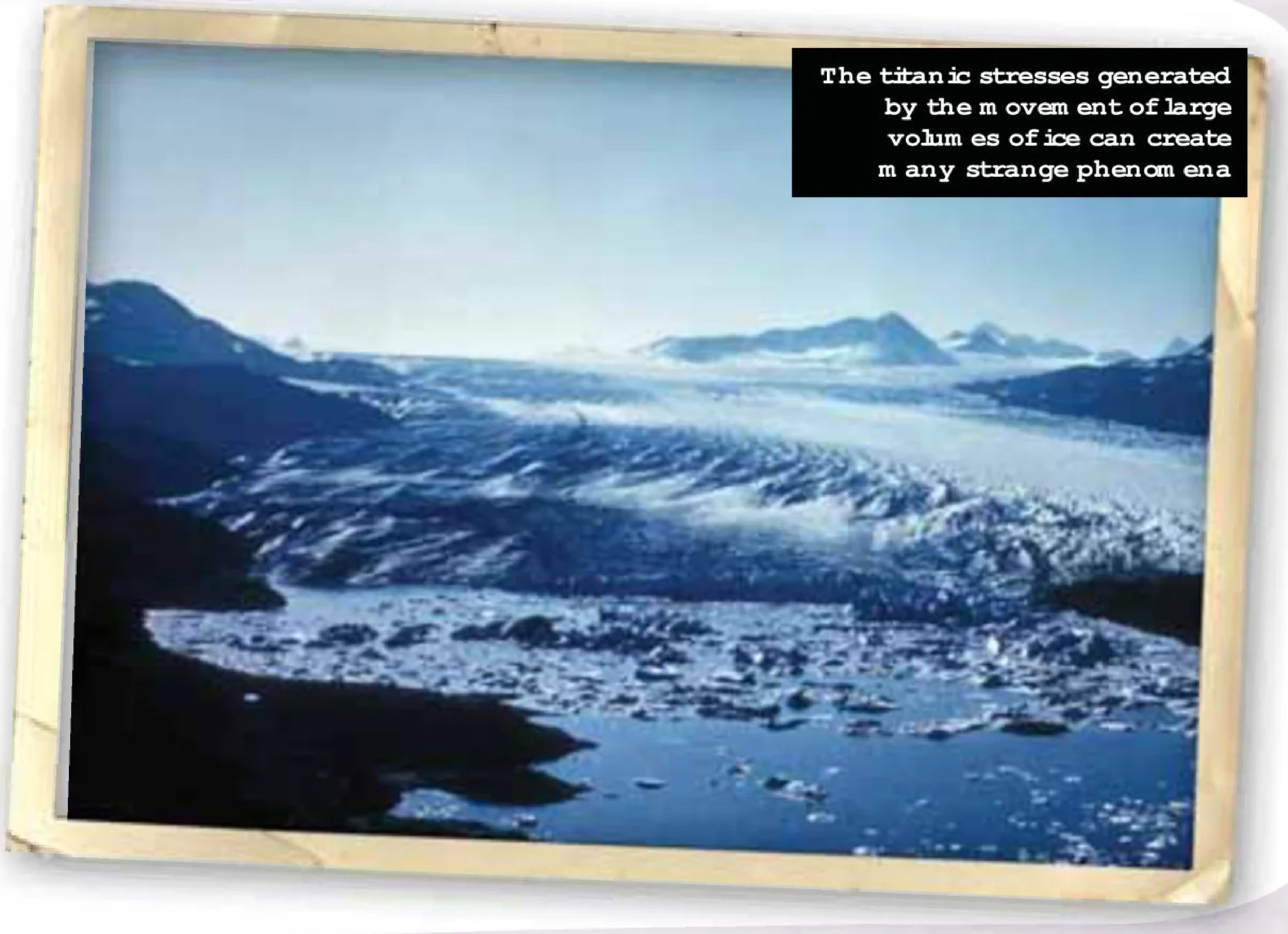
The Bloop's approximate location is home to other ocean mysteries, like the Eltanin Antenna

THE BLOOP

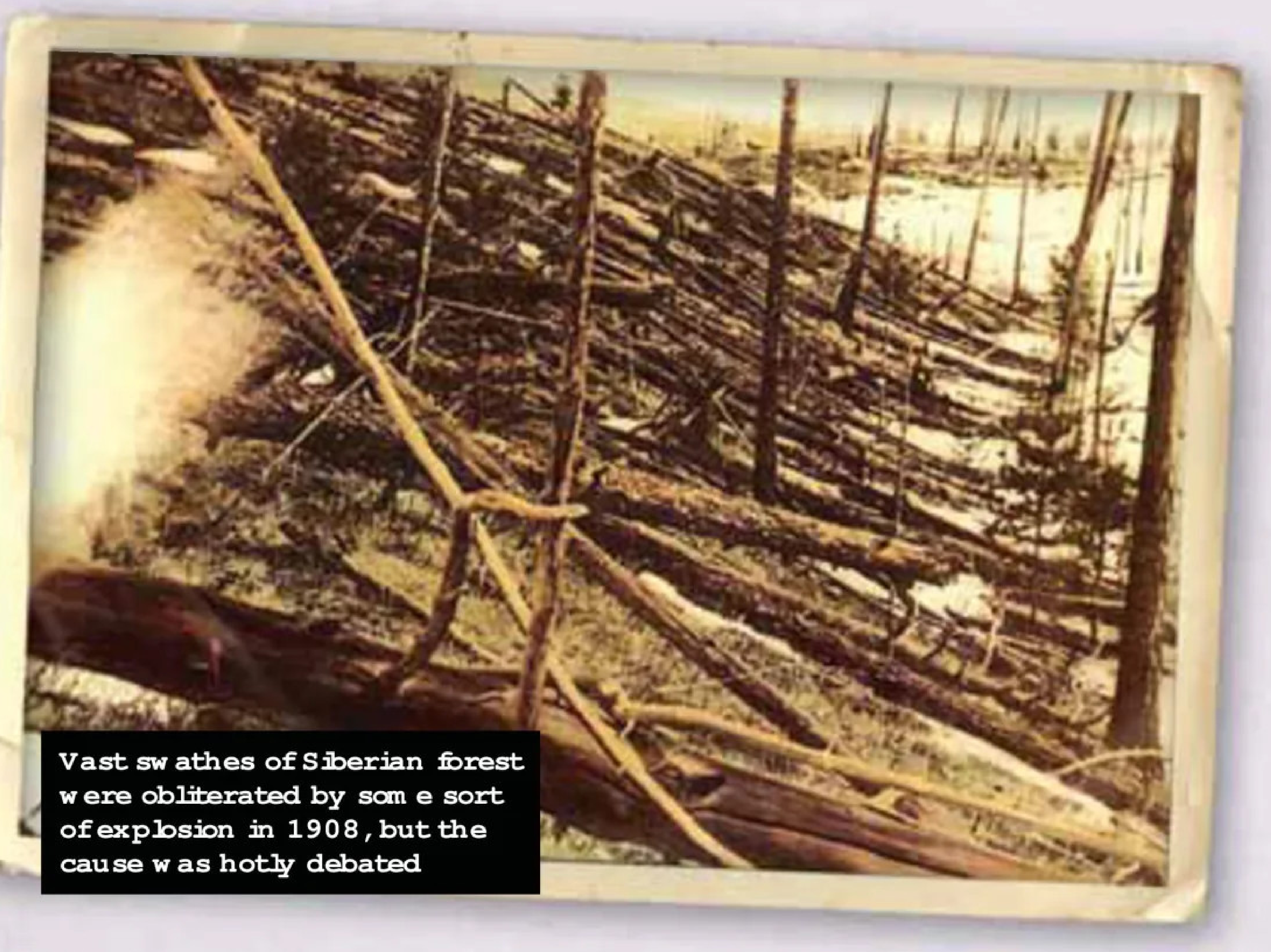
Was a recording of a loud underwater rumble evidence of an unknown creature?

In 1997 underwater listening devices recorded a low frequency sound in the South Pacific loud enough to be heard over a range of 3000 miles, nicknamed The Bloop. The first theory was that it was produced by an animal, but one far larger than anything else ever heard. Mysterious underwater noises had previously identified as whale calls and even herring farts.

Since then it has been determined that The Bloop was caused by an ice quake – the breaking up of large volumes of ice or frozen permafrost. Because water is such an efficient conductor of sound the noises generated can be transmitted over long distances.



The titanic stresses generated by the movement of large volumes of ice can create many strange phenomena



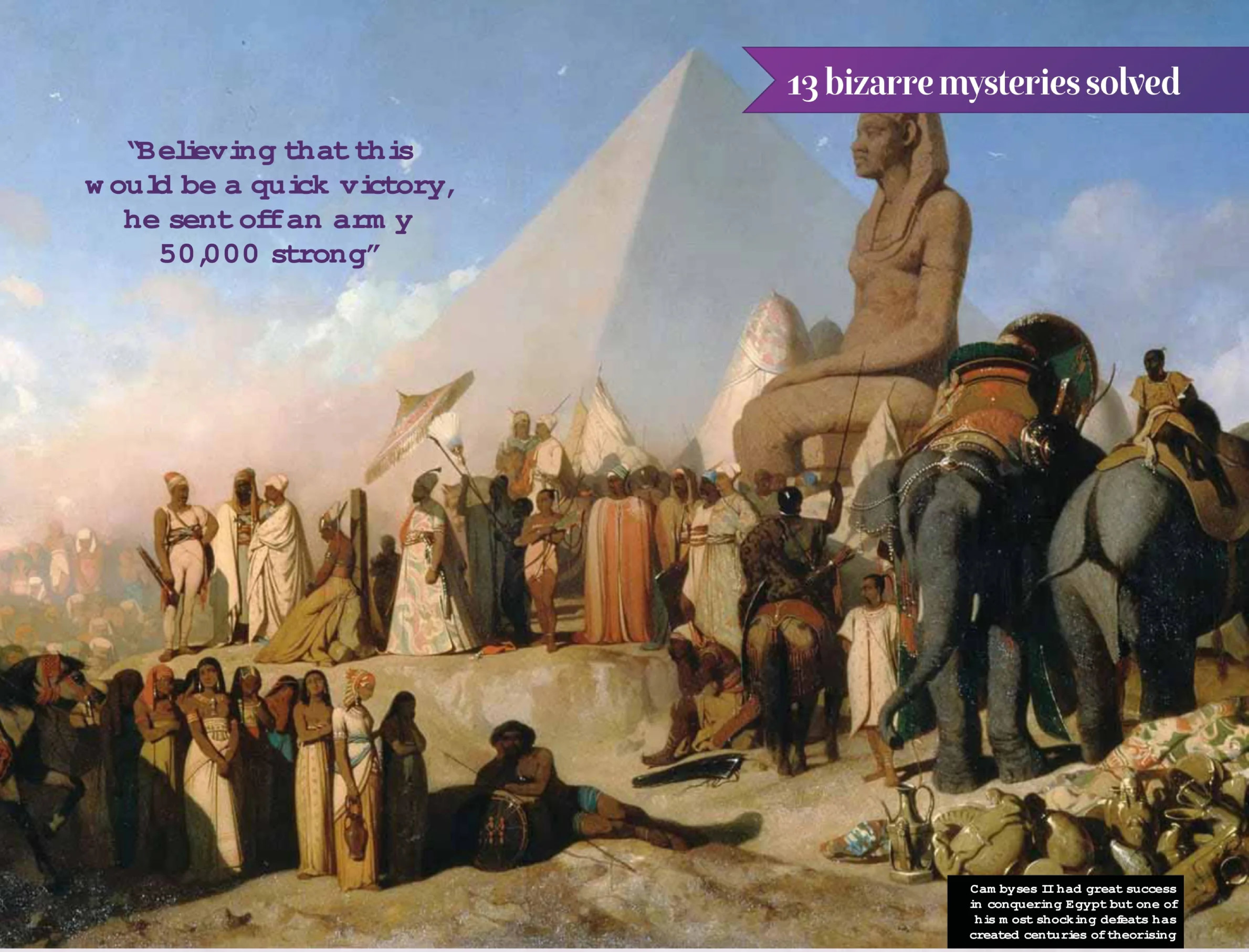
Vast swathes of Siberian forest were obliterated by some sort of explosion in 1908, but the cause was hotly debated

THE TUNGUSKA BLAST

What levelled 80 million trees when it exploded in 1908

On 30 June, 1908 there was a blast over Siberia that was so powerful that hundreds of square miles of forest were completely flattened. A light reportedly as bright as the sun was seen streaking across the sky. Windows in buildings were shattered long distances away. Some theorised this was an atomic explosion, before the invention of such bombs, or even a crashing UFO.

Examination of the soil in the area has detected the telltale chemical signs of a meteorite impact. The iron-nickel meteorite that exploded over Tunguska is thought to have released as much energy as 30 million tons of TNT.



"Believing that this would be a quick victory, he sent off an army 50,000 strong"

Cambyses II had great success in conquering Egypt but one of his most shocking defeats has created centuries of theorising

THE LOST ARMY OF CAMBYSES II

How did a force of 50,000 men disappear while crossing a desert?

Cambyses II was the ruler of the vast Persian empire in the 6th century BCE. He set out to conquer Egypt and Ethiopia with a huge army. One of the centres of opposition was at the oracle near the oasis of Siwa in the deserts of Egypt. Believing that this would be a quick victory he sent off an army 50,000 strong but may not have given them sufficient provisions. Still, hopes were high.

In summer 2000 an oil-prospecting team found remnants of ancient weapons in the Western Desert

The Greek historian Herodotus recorded what happened next. The army vanished. It was never heard from again and the oasis was not conquered. Herodotus tells us that the people of the oasis said the army was swallowed by the sands. "When the Persians were crossing the sand from Oasis to attack them, and were about midway between their country and Oasis, while they were breakfasting a great and violent south wind arose, which buried them in the masses of sand which it bore; and so they disappeared from sight."

For hundreds of years historians doubted that any such army was ever lost. No evidence had been found of such a stunning defeat by the Persians. Some thought that Herodotus simply made the lost army up, or at least vastly exaggerated the event. Much of what the ancient historian recorded was actually legend, hearsay, the equivalent of urban myth, or even just gossip.

Many archaeologists have scoured the desert for what should be lurking in the sands – if the tale is true. It was around the nearby Dakhla Oasis that the answer may have been found. Excavations there suggest that the army of Cambyses did not simply vanish in billowing sand storms. It seems the army was ambushed and killed by forces of a rebel pharaoh who had risen in opposition to Persia. To hide the shame of this defeat it is thought that the tale of a sudden sandstorm was written down.

Images source: Wiki

COUPLE LOST IN THE ALPS

The missing Dumoulins

In 1942 a Swiss couple called Marcelin and Francine Dumoulin went out to tend their cows and never returned. Extensive searches were made but no trace was found. Their children never gave up hope. In 2017 the remains of the Dumoulins were recovered from a glacier. They seem to have fallen into a crevasse and were unable to escape. One of their surviving daughters was grateful that the pair would now get the burial they deserved.

THE LOCATION OF THE USS INDIANAPOLIS

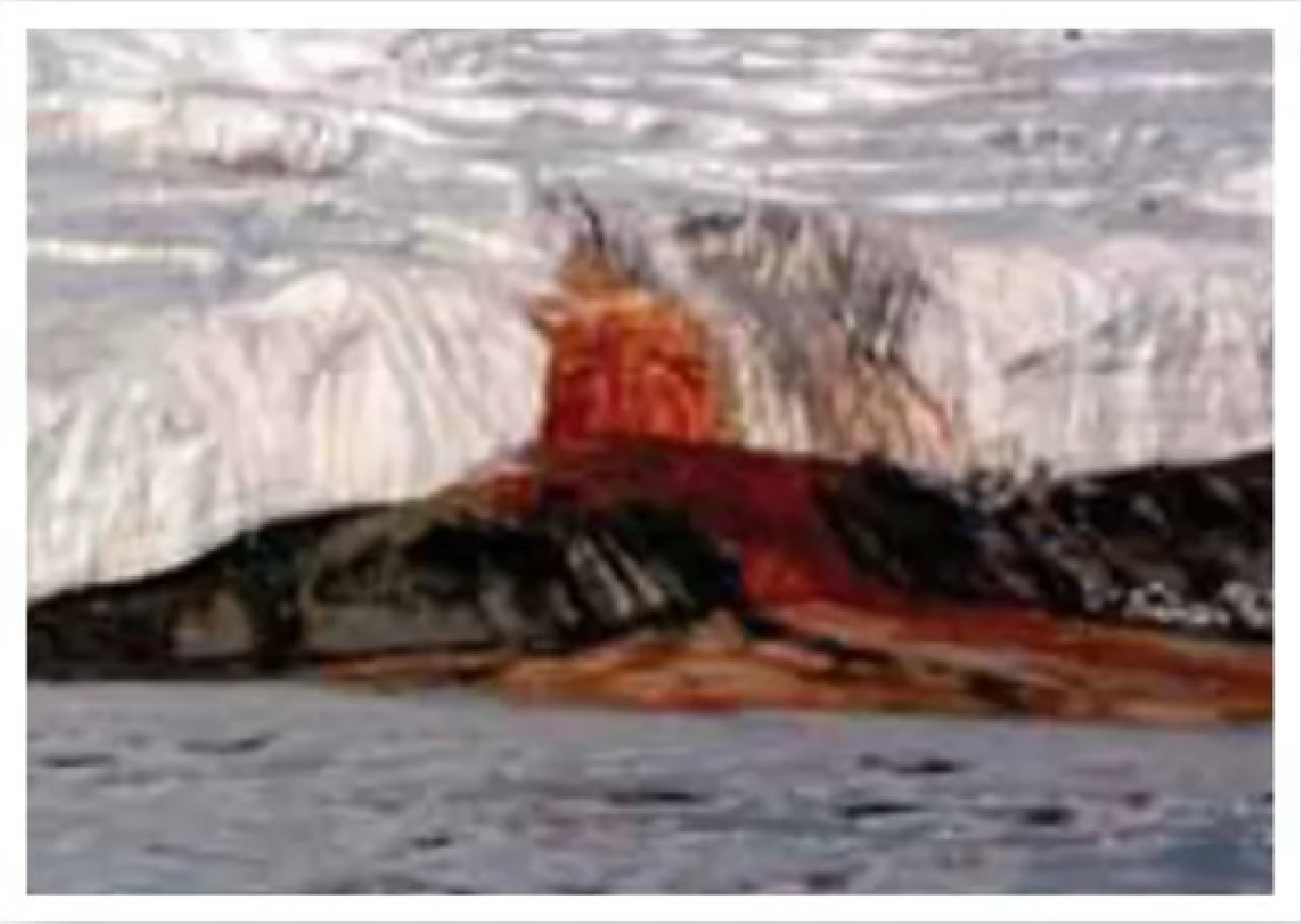
Sunk without trace until 2017

When the USS Indianapolis was sunk by Japanese submarines in 1945 over 850 of the crew were killed by drowning, exposure, and shark attacks. Despite knowing where the approximate location of the sinking occurred the wreck eluded discovery by several expeditions using sonar and submersibles. In 2017 new documents were uncovered that gave a more accurate location. Soon afterwards the superbly preserved remains of the Indianapolis were found 18,000 feet below the waves.

Just before its disappearance, the USS Indianapolis had been involved in a secret mission

BLOODY GLACIERS

Antartica's Blood Falls



At the base of the Taylor Glacier in Antarctica a plume of vibrant red can be seen flowing from the ice. Because of the colour this has been known since its discovery as Blood Falls. Initially the red hue was thought to be due to algae but the true explanation is as spectacular as the falls themselves. Around 2 million years ago the glacier covered a small body of water. The bacteria trapped there evolved to metabolise iron, and its their waste products that turn the falls bloody.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LT BARRY TROY

The pilot who vanished into the fog

On 25 February 1958 Canadian pilot Barry Troy took off from Naval Station Mayport in Florida. His plane disappeared in a bank of fog and he was never seen again. Following a hurricane in 2017 several artefacts were washed up on a nearby beach. Among them were fragments of a parachute with Troy's name written on it. While Troy's body was not found pieces of his aircraft that were also found on the shore were buried in his parent's grave.

THE FATE OF SUBMARINE U-26

The missing U-boat

The German submarine U-26 had inflicted stunning defeats on shipping in the Baltic Sea during the first year of World War One. Then in 1915 it failed to return to its base. Nothing was known about its fate for nearly 100 years. In 2014 sonar scans revealed the wreck of a submarine in the Gulf of Finland. It was discovered to be the remains of U-26 which had struck a mine on its way back to Germany and sunk with all 30 of its crew.

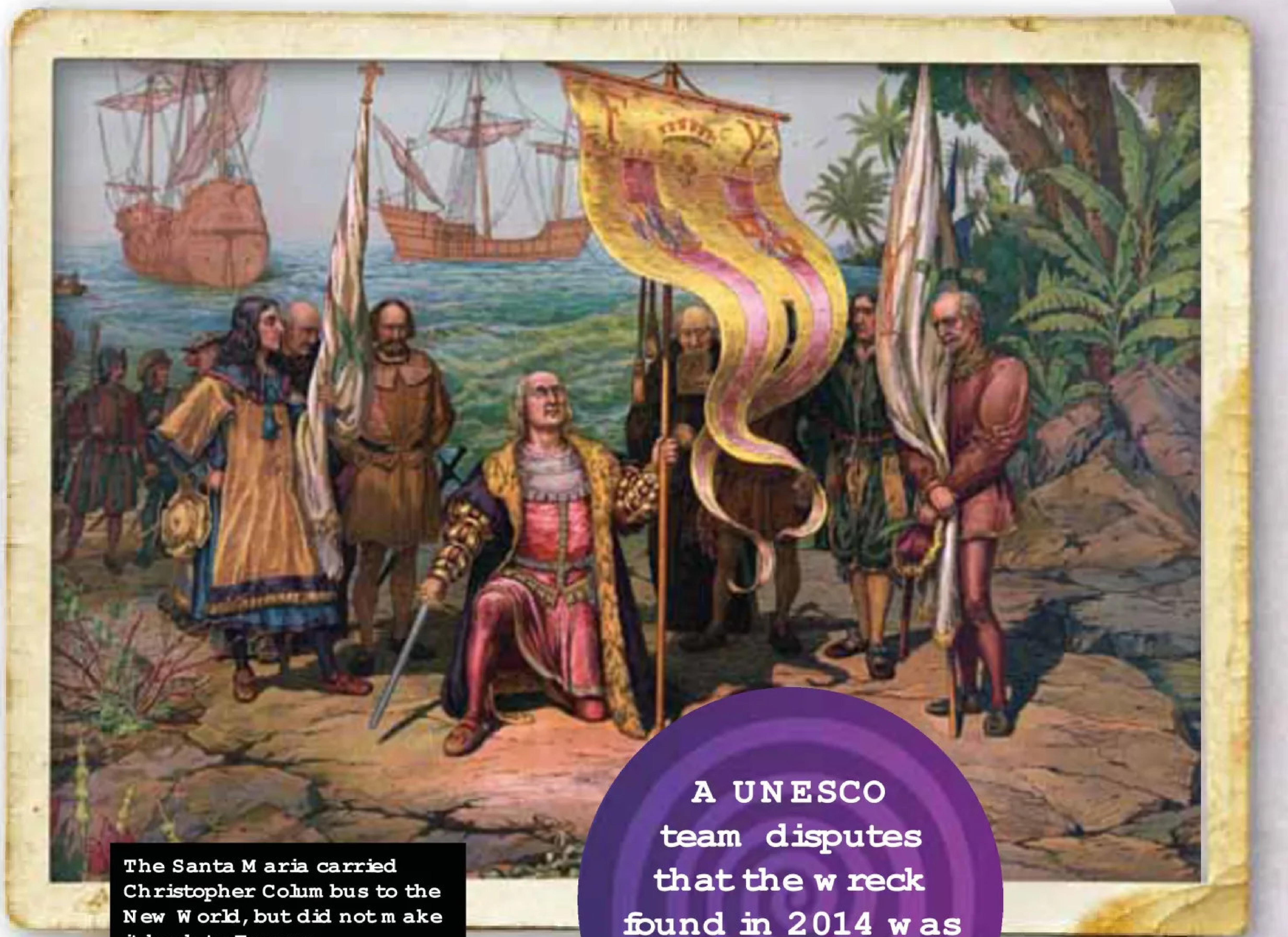
THE WRECK OF THE SANTA MARIA

In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, but not all his ships returned

The voyages of Christopher Columbus that located the New World are justly famous. With three ships called the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, Columbus crossed the Atlantic in search of a route to Asia by sailing westwards. The largest of his ships, and the one under his command, was the Santa Maria. On the return journey, disaster struck.

Columbus had retired to sleep and a cabin boy was left to steer the Santa Maria when she ran aground on a sandbank near Haiti and had to be abandoned. Timbers and other goods were salvaged, but the ship itself could not be recovered. The location of the wreck of the Santa Maria, one of the most famous ships in history, was lost.

In 2014 it was announced that Columbus' flagship had been discovered. However, Columbus' log mentions the ship's timbers being used to build a fortified village called La Navidad.



The Santa Maria carried Christopher Columbus to the New World, but did not make it back to Europe

A UNESCO team disputes that the wreck found in 2014 was that of the Santa Maria

"Boken was a local police officer in Long Island and he quit the force soon after [his girlfriend] Louise Pietrewicz vanished"

POLICE LINE: DO NOT CROSS
POLICE LINE: DO NOT

Just what was the connection between the missing Louise Pietrewicz and the failure of police to find her?

THE MURDER OF LOUISE PIETREWICZ

What happened to a woman who tried to flee her unhappy marriage?

Louise Pietrewicz was not happy with her abusive husband. In October 1966 she closed her bank account and took out $1,273.80 in cash to start a new life with her boyfriend William Boken. Pietrewicz kissed her daughter goodbye as she sent her to school, and was never seen again.

Boken was a local police officer in Long Island and he quit the force soon after Pietrewicz vanished. Despite complaints from the missing woman's family, two weeks were allowed to lapse before any investigation took place. Boken, who was never arrested in connection with the case, said that he had taken Pietrewicz to "the city" – New York – and left her there.

In 2018 the wife of the deceased Boken came forward and claimed there was a body buried under his old house. Under layers of concrete in the basement, police recovered remains that, after testing, proved conclusively to be Louise Pietrewicz. How Boken got away with this crime does remain a mystery, however.

Images source: Getty, Wiki

HISTORY'S WEIRDEST MYSTERIES

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